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Tradition and the Individual Talents: Dylan, Eliot, and DeLillo

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Tradition and the Individual Talents: Dylan, Eliot, and DeLillo

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Dedication

For my family

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Tradition and the Individual Talents: Dylan, Eliot, and DeLillo

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Drawing from a variety of multimedia and archival materials, my dissertation involves a three-figure examination of Bob Dylan, T.S. Eliot, and Don DeLillo. These three figures are linked, (as some other critics have noted) through scattered intertextual allusions. But I argue that a more telling correlation exists in the manner in which all three managed to rise to the apex of their respective fields. I examine this phenomenon and in so doing, my project seeks out a composite theoretical model, better suited to explain the multiform artistry of Dylan and to account for the related transformative cultural navigation of Eliot and DeLillo at key points their careers.

My dissertation sheds light on these authors drawing on Bourdieu's model of "the field of cultural production" and Bolter and Grusin's concept of "remediation:" how print, photography film, and other media appropriate, influence, and reconstitute each other. I reconfigure their concept to focus on individual agency and situate these three as consummate remediators of their own and each other's work, their individual legacies, and ultimately the very "field of cultural production" itself.

This reading recasts our understanding of each author: I position Dylan as a major contemporary literary figure; Eliot as a consummate public performer and recording artist; and DeLillo as a visionary cultural remixer. This analysis provides fresh

perspectives on the idea of authorship, canonicity and textuality, as it suggests that a vigorous literary analysis requires us to move beyond a specific medium associated with an author toward a dynamic field of multimodal intertextuality. Literary research and pedagogy in the media-saturated 21st century classroom demand a canon unbound. Such a canon, I argue, should include figures like Dylan, as it should also provoke a fuller, more vital engagement with "the literary tradition" within which we place figures like Eliot and DeLillo. My work, situated at the crossroads between American literature, cultural studies, and the emerging field of the digital humanities, thus produces a more nuanced understanding of the authors in question, the canonical heritage to which they contribute, and the scholarly methods by which we appraise and teach their works.

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Pragmatism not Idealism: a Deliberate Approach

Everybody knows by now that there's a gazillion books on me either out or coming out in the near future. So I'm encouraging anybody who's ever met me, heard me or even seen me, to get in on the action and scribble their own book. You never know, somebody might have a great book in them.

—Bob Dylan, “To My Fans and Followers”

Immature poets imitate; mature poets steal; bad poets deface what they take, and good poets make it into something better, or at least something different. The good poet welds his theft into a whole of feeling which is unique, utterly different from that from which it was torn; the bad poet throws it into something which has no cohesion. A good poet will usually borrow from authors remote in time, or alien in language, or diverse in interest.

— T. S. Eliot, “Philip Massinger”

Talent is everything. If you've got talent, nothing else matters. You can screw up your personal life something terrible. So what. If you've got talent, it's there in reserve. Anybody who has talent they know they have it and that's it. It's what makes you what you are. It tells you you're you. Talent is everything; sanity is nothing. I'm convinced of it.

—Don DeLillo, *Americana*

The emotion of art is impersonal. And the poet cannot reach this impersonality without surrendering himself wholly to the work to be done. And he is not likely to know what is to be done unless he lives in what is not merely the present, but the present moment of the past, unless he is conscious, not of what is dead, but of what is already living.

—T.S. Eliot, “Tradition and the Individual Talent”

My dissertation begins with four short quotations from three famous figures who came to prominence in the twentieth century, whose legacies continue into the twenty-first, and one might reasonably conjecture, live on in centuries to come. Each of these opening quotations draws from a cross-section of genres and differs markedly in tone, form, and implied audience and subject. Likewise, as my dissertation title spells out, I mix chronology, placing Dylan before Eliot and DeLillo; this is deliberate. For though my chronology appears mixed-up (i.e. non-linear) the concept of "time" plays a central role in my examination along its related component fields: history, order, influence, culture and tradition, order and origin. I intentionally position Dylan before the other two "Talents" named in my title because he has for me primacy as both the artist who entered my consciousness first[1] and, more impressively, because of his singular achievement of rising to the very apex of his profession, "hip, without peer or precedent" (Cocks). As has been rehearsed and rehashed countless times, Bob Dylan radically changed the field of popular music. Biographer Howard Sounes provides a typical, traditional (though rather lackluster) example of this narrative, noting that Dylan composed songs "as diverse in subject matter and as rich in imagery as the work of a major poet or novelist […] Dylan changed music in the 1960s by bringing poetic lyrics to popular song" (10).

[1] I distinctly remember the moment of making the "new" discovery of Bob Dylan in junior high school. My friend, Michael and I were listening to his father's records and he switched on *Greatest Hits Volume II*, placing the needle on "It's All Over Now Baby Blue"; my old life was over, my new one just begun.

Dylan did much more than Sounes' mundane prose alone would imply, and I draw attention to Sounes' introduction to highlight an aspect of my ensuing analysis. A reader may observe that I adopt a number of different tonal registers at different points in my analysis, at times shifting from an impersonal, academic mode of criticism to a highly personal first-person voice. In doing so, I mean to reflect in my own prose an indispensable hallmark of the three principal figures I examine—their uncommon success, which stems in great measure from their remarkable ability to produce influential works of art in a panoply of media. Likewise, this maneuver consciously reflects a tenet of the cultural theory of Pierre Bourdieu, where reactions to works of art both personal and collective hold significant meaning for understanding, as in his surveys of museum goers in *Distinction.*

I should like to set out my own distinctions and, here at the outset, set forth provisional definitions of key terms that I will draw upon in the rest of my analysis. This pragmatic approach will, I hope, both clearly map the general purview of my theoretical model and methodology and help avoid the encumbrance of lengthy theoretical asides that would unnecessarily interrupt and bog down the flow of my critique. The reader is advised to keep in mind the initial delineations I offer here and refer back to them when I invoke key terms in my ensuing analysis. In the rare instances where additional clarification is necessary, I will provide more theoretical/methodological description in the form of footnotes or refer to additional, explanatory passages. I draw principally from two theoretical texts, Bourdieu's *The Field of Cultural Production,* and Jay David

Bolter and Richard Grusin's *Remediation*. Out of these works I draw the italicized key terms that follow, starting with Bourdieu's term *field:*

> What do I mean by 'field'? As I use the term, a field is a separate social universe having its own laws of functioning independent of those of politics and the economy. The existence of the writer, as fact and as value is inseparable from the existence of the literary field as an autonomous universe endowed with specific principles of evaluation of practices and works. To understand Flaubert or Baudelaire, or any writer, major or minor, is first of all to understand what the status of writer consists of at the moment considered; that is, more precisely, the social conditions of the possibility of this social function, of this social personage. In fact, the invention of the writer, in the modern sense of the term, is inseparable from the progressive invention of a particular social game, which I term the *literary field* and which is constituted as it establishes its autonomy, that is to say, its specific functioning laws of functioning, within the field of power. (*The Field of Cultural Production* 162-63)

This definition gives rise to three related terms that have some currency in my analysis, the specifically *literary field*, *symbolic capital*, and the overarching *field of cultural production.* Given its placement as the books title, the concept of *the field of cultural production* is an exceedingly expansive and convoluted system detailing a multitude of social structures, illustrations, and overlapping subfields; thus any comprehensive definition of this concept for the purposes of my examination is superfluous[2]. When I

[2] Randal Johnson in his introduction to *The Field of Cultural Production* does however provide a useful distillation to serve as a place marker, noting Bourdieu's theory "takes into consideration not only works themselves, seen relationally within the space of available possibilities and within the historical development of such possibilities, but also producers of works in terms of their strategies and trajectories, based on their individual and class habitus, as well as their objective position within the field. It also entails an analysis of the structure of the field itself, which includes the positions occupied by producers (e.g. writers, artists) as well as those occupied by all the instances of consecration and legitimating which make cultural products what they are (the public publishers, critics, galleries, academies, and so forth)"(9). Johnson's summation suggests the practical application of Bourdieu's model to my work; it offers an uncommonly wide

invoke the term "cultural production," I refer primarily to *symbolic capital*, "to be understood as economic or political capital that is disavowed, misrecognized, and thereby recognized, hence legitimate, a 'credit' which, under certain conditions, and always in the long run, guarantees 'economic profits'" (75) in relation to the specifically *literary* and *artistic fields*:

> The artistic field is a *universe of belief*. Cultural production distinguishes itself from the production of the most common objects in that it must produce not only the object in its materiality, but also the value of the object, that is, the recognition of artistic legitimacy. This is inseparable from the production of the artist or the writer as an artist or writer, in other words, as a creator of value. (164)

In invoking this definition I wish to highlight what I consider essential in Bourdieu's terminology, the deeply intertwined elements of producer, product, value, and belief. I should note that in referring to terms that appear in these definitions, i.e. "cultural production," "field" "artistic legitimacy," and I would qualify his definition by altering "inseparable" to instead read "nearly-inseparable." While this may appear a minor change, it points to an important, larger qualification of Bourdieu's terminology in my project; when I invoke these terms I nearly always do so with the ideas of motion and

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scope of inquiry while simultaneously allowing for a detailed examination of intricate , personal networks of meaning.

multiplicity involved. Put another way, I examine principally the *navigation through* the "field of cultural production."

Bolter and Grusin help highlight this fluid aspect of my analysis with their concept of *remediation*, which they define as "the formal logic by which new media technologies refashion prior media forms" (273). Though Bolter and Grusin explain various permutations and aspects of *remediation*, they invariably describe a disembodied, historical process of media transfiguration: of print, photography, film, and other media appropriating, influencing, and refashioning each other. I draw upon their theory but radically reconfigure their work and place a primary focus on individual agency; I situate Dylan, Eliot, and DeLillo as consummate *remediators.* This allows for a synchronic visual, cultural, and (sub)textual examination; it offers a fuller mode of critical analysis than those that have been performed previously in relation to these figures.

This reading recasts our understanding of each author: I position Dylan as a major contemporary literary figure; Eliot as a consummate public performer and artist; and DeLillo as a visionary cultural remixer. This analysis provides fresh perspectives on the idea of authorship, canonicity, and textuality, as it insists that vigorous literary analysis requires us to move beyond a specific medium associated with an author toward a dynamic field of multimodal intertextuality. Literary research and pedagogy in the media-saturated 21st century classroom demand a canon unbound. Such a canon, I argue, should include figures like Dylan, as it should also provoke a fuller, more vital engagement and updating or *remediating of* the Eliotic "literary tradition."

Very few, if any 20th century writers have been examined by literary critics with more frequency and tenacity than T. S. Eliot. Presently, any would-be Eliot scholar confronts a long history of criticism on the author and his work. Despite the numerous volumes about Eliot, I find few have yet viewed Eliot using a composite theoretical model that draws specifically from Bourdieu's model of the field of cultural production.[3] As such, my dissertation does not attempt to synthesize or redirect the sea of Eliot studies so much as to provide another way of viewing Eliot in the contemporary critical environment; to adopt Johnson's language, my dissertation employs Bourdieu to provide a radical contextualization of Eliot. A new contextualization will: provide a novel model for viewing and programmatically dissecting Eliot's complex transatlantic maneuverings through the cultural field(s) throughout various stages of his literary career and, more importantly for my project, establish a new context for examining Eliot as a paradigmatic literary cross-field cultural producer a literary predecessor of Bob Dylan and Don DeLillo, two figures who have sometimes been discussed in relation to Eliot, but most often such analysis is limited to formalistic textual allusions.

Perhaps for the first time in the modern era, T.S. Eliot broke the divide between poet and cultural producer—embodying both a man of letters and a popular celebrity. This is not to say that Eliot was the first to achieve considerable critical accolades as well as a degree of celebrity in the non-academic sphere. One can find a number of

[3] When I began this section of my project in April 2007, a search of the online MLA International Bibliography database using "T.S. Eliot" and "Bourdieu" as key terms in several combinations yielded no results. A growing body of scholarship has since been published, which I draw from in my ensuing analysis.

predecessors in this regard, ranging from Emerson to Tennyson; however, Eliot's unique, modernist-historical position traverses the emergence of various new media (international newspaper circulation, specialized and commercial "elite" small press publishing, literary interview, radio,[4] and eventually television), which enabled his unique and foundational position of critical acclaim and multi-media cultural dominance.[5] Just as Dylan is often described as the revolutionary who brought poetry to rock and roll, one can think of Eliot as the poet who became a rock star of sorts, appearing on the cover of *Time* magazine and attracting crowds of fourteen thousand "fans" eager to take in the larger-than-life Nobel Prize winner in the flesh. Through his radio addresses, public lectures, editorials, engagement with the popular culture of American and Europe[6], and canon-forming literary criticism, Eliot expanded the literary field to appropriate other fields previously

[4] In 1929, Eliot produced his first radio broadcast, and he produced some eighty-plus broadcasts before deteriorating health forced him to give up his radio work in 1963. See Michael Coyle, "'This Rather Elusory Broadcast Technique': T. S. Eliot and the Genre of the Radio Talk." ANQ: A Quarterly Journal of Short Articles 11.4 (Fall 1998): 32-42. Coyle writes, "Eliot's attraction to the BBC remains inexplicable solely in terms of public self-fashioning or of personal gain. A better account can be made by recovering his sense of the generic differences of a broadcast "talk" from either a formal lecture or a published essay. In 1929 those differences seemed important, but by 1959 neither Eliot nor the BBC paid them much regard. The effacing of that distinction is also our loss and marks the collapse of at least one modernist dream: Eliot's attempt to modernize the discourse of culture" (33).

[5] One might also point to Walt Whitman as an earlier prototype of the kind of multi-field accolades and celebrity that I will explore in Eliot's example. See especially, David Blake's *Walt Whitman and the Culture of American Celebrity*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006.

[6] See Chinitz, David E. "In the Shadows: Popular Song and Eliot's Construction of Emotion." *Modernism/Modernity* 11.3 (Sept. 2004): 449-67.; and Hargrove, Nancy D. "T.S. Eliot and Popular Entertainment in Paris, 1910-1911." *Journal of Popular Culture* 36.3 (Winter 2003): 547-88.

outside the purviews of "a man of letters," and in so doing inaugurated a novel approach and rapid reshaping of that otherwise glacially static and unassailable monolith—tradition.

One can think of Eliot's entire career and paramount artistic and critical concern as a sustained effort to (re)construct and make viable a transhistorical literary tradition. His unique concept of tradition finds its most direct articulation in his essay "Tradition and the Individual Talent" (1920). "The influence of Eliot's essay 'Tradition and the Individual Talent' was epoch-making in literary criticism" (Kramer 20), and though influential and foundational, Eliot and his tradition-centered epoch are largely understood as being superseded by or even running counter to the concerns of contemporary scholarship. While a contemporary literary critic often unthinkingly and disparagingly pairs Eliot with "the literary tradition," with all of the attendant controversies of multiculturalism, patriarchy, and political hegemony, one should not forget Eliot's cautionary remarks about the use and understanding of "tradition," remarks that, quoted selectively, speak directly to our current critical practice and (mis)understanding of the term:

> We cannot refer to 'the tradition' or to 'a tradition'; at most we employ the adjective in saying that the poetry of So-and-so is 'traditional' or even 'too traditional'. Seldom, perhaps does the word appear except in a phrase of censure. . . .You can hardly make the word agreeable to English ears . . .. ("Tradition and the Individual Talent" 42)

Indeed, for numerous reasons, Eliot's use of the word tradition rings disagreeably with many scholars, to the point that, for many, Eliot's poetry and certainly his criticism

have become anachronistic, "too traditional" for the ears and tastes of a post-structural, post-colonial critical community. I would suggest, however, that a re-evaluation of Eliot's seminal essay in conjunction with a larger cultural field model reveals a contemporary importance and crucial currency to the essay and its attendant concerns. Authors too numerous to recount here have commented on Eliot's essay and tried to appropriate, disavow, or simply contextualize it within the larger realm of post-structuralist literary theory. One of the first attempts to radically recoup Eliot's essay from disavowal and into the realm of currency comes from Jurgen Kramer, who in his 1975 article, "T.S. Eliot's Concept of Tradition: A Revaluation" expands the realm of tradition as articulated in Eliot's essay, exploring the possibility that Eliot's articulation of tradition "was that of a potentially dialectical concept of tradition" (20), brings a host of philosophers into his essay to suggest possible expansions and recontextualizations of how we might think of "tradition" as a more dynamic or "dialectical concept" than previously attributed to Eliot through his use of the concept in his famous essay. Employing a host of philosophical quotations on tradition, including Adorno, Leavis, Holz, and Benjamin, Kramer argues for a dialectical understanding of tradition a dynamic historical sense, noting "the historical sense is not simply a solely historical sense but *an historical and structural one at the same time*" (21). Through this rearticulating of the possible philosophical connotations of "tradition" Kramer attempts, to use his own words, "to revive blocked values of the spiritual tradition and to introduce them fruitfully into the present social and artistic problems" (21). Ultimately though, Kramer fails it in

this mission. He searches in vain for biographical support and intertextual links to connect Eliot with the coterie of philosophical exegeses on "tradition" that he brings forth, in the end admitting, "It remains to be decided whether Eliot realized the existence of this implicit power of a dynamic concept of tradition." Likewise, further on in the essay he waffles:

> [I]t is still not clear, whether, and if at all, how much Eliot's concepts of "present" and "past" really are to be understood historically and structurally at the same time, so that a *dynamic* conception could be deduced from them, or whether he only wanted to replace on 'bad' tradition *just once* by a 'good' one. (23-24)

In buttressing his argument with only the context of intertextuality and biographical criticism, Kramer remains undecided about whether his revaluation of Eliot's seminal essay can actually be linked to Eliot. He can offer only specious, hopelessly equivocal "determinations" such as "Tradition is always acquired *for us* and *by us*; by re-creating it we experience the identity of identity and non-identity. The function of the literature of the past for the present is irreplaceable," explorations that however profound at first sounding, remain in the too nondescript and abstract to be of much use for a critical revaluation of "tradition," especially a revaluation of a possible novel understanding and re-appropriation of Eliot's specific articulation and embodiment of a dynamic literary tradition. Lacking convincing and stable links to the assorted dynamic conceptions of tradition, Kramer leaves his reader in a kind of indeterminate no-

man's-land, concluding his essay with the inadequate and overly-general summation, "Literature as one of man's pre-eminent means of self-reflexion, has to play an important part in this self-examination" (30).

I will suggest a more compelling configuration of "literature" in regard to "self-reflexion" When applied to the study of Dylan and DeLillo, It includes a dialectic model of self-referentiality so far lacking in Dylan studies, but also enables a kind of foundational analysis that applies not just to Dylan and studies of Dylan, but to the discipline as a whole, especially with regard to the attendant questions of canonicity and pedagogy. In terms of methodology, I will focus on particularly evocative texts and moments, rather than try to deal with each author's entire oeuvre, especially as each now boasts a colossal corpus (perhaps triply large in 2011 than when I began working on my dissertation after completing my prospectus in 2005). I mean for the reader to view these individual moments not as isolated and distinct, but rather and component parts building through the narrative sequence of my dissertation the larger whole, recalling Johnson's gloss on Bourdieu that "The full explanation of artistic works is to be found neither in the text itself, nor is some sort of determinant social structure. Rather, it is to be found in the history and structure of the field itself, with its multiple components" (9): sight and sound, text and archive, public and private, traditionand talent.

Eliot through Time: Eliot Then

> Ah, but we die to each other daily.
> What we know of other people
> Is only our memory of the moments
> During which we knew them. And they have changed
> since then.
> To pretend that they and we are the same
> Is a useful and convenient social convention
> Which must sometimes be broken. We must also remem-
> ber
> That at every meeting we are meeting a stranger.
> — T. S. Eliot, *The Cocktail Party*

Mark Spitz once described how it is extremely difficult to write of Bob Dylan without making it all sound like an exaggeration (xi-xv). Spitz's observation could equally be applied to the difficulty of writing about T.S. Eliot. This observation proves particularly apt concerning how Eliot was construed by critics over the nearly five decades of his dominant influence on English poetry and criticism. This observation is perhaps best evinced in a summation from Cynthia Ozick: "when, four decades ago, in a literary period that resembled eternity, T.S. Eliot won the Nobel Prize in Literature, he seemed pure zenith. A colossus, nothing less than a permanent luminary, fixed in the firmament like the sun and the moon" (119). F.R. Leavis locates Eliot as among "the greatest poets of the English language" (71). In his *New York Times* obituary a coterie of famous writers paid tribute to Eliot; Allen Tate and Craig Raine unequivocally position

Eliot atop the poetic pantheon with their respective praises: "Mr. Eliot was the greatest poet in English of the 20th century," and "he was the most influential and authoritative literary arbiter of the twentieth century." To Robert Lowell, "Our American literature has had no greater poet or critic." And for Robert Penn Warren: "He is the key figure of our century in America and England, the most powerful single influence." (30) To Lowell's and Penn Warren's praises, one could likewise add several other voices to the chorus of Eliot's contemporaries—Ezra Pound, Wyndam Lewis[7], Conrad Aiken[8], Marianne Moore[9], Archibald MacLeish[10], and Stephen Spender[11]—a diverse grouping of

[7] There are countless books and bibliographic entries linking Pound and Eliot, which I need not rehearse here. (*The Letters of Wyndham Lewis*. Norfolk, Conn: New Directions, 1963), however, provides perhaps the most interest single source, as it offers direct private appraisals of Eliot from both of these influential modernists. A compilation of references pertaining to Eliot can be found indexed on page 541).

[8] See for example: Aiken, Conrad. "T.S. Eliot." *Life* 15 Jan 1965 (93).; Beach, Joseph Warren. "Conrad Aiken and T. S. Eliot: Echoes and Overtones." *PMLA* 69.4 (1954) (753-762).

[9] Moore corresponded extensively with Eliot for more than four decades beginning in the early twenties. Moore came to view Eliot as a trusted advisor: "Nothing would give me greater pleasure than to have your advice, if any more of my work were to be published." Moore also viewed Eliot as an imagistic poetic of singular vision, likening his "poems with paintings, and like Pound, she saw an Eliot who is a true friend of the object. His poems are like Whistler's Post-Impressionistic English canvases, but just as Eliot's portraits are an improvement on Browning, his city scenes are an improvement on Whistler, for Eliot refuses to hide his objects 'under shadows and the haze of distance'" (qtd. in (Brooker xvii).

[10] "The new generation," as he wrote in 1925, "is first and foremost Mr. Eliot. It is an introspective, self-conscious, sensitive, doubtful, deeply stirred generation, a deflected generation compelled to difficult utterance, a passionate generation afflicted with that *maladie du siècle*—'ne pas vouloir être dupe'" (qtd. in Mizener 509).

[11] Spender recounts first meeting Eliot in 1928: "at University College, Oxford, when he addressed an undergraduate club, the Martlets…There was a dinner, at the end of which the menu was passed round and signed by all present. I still have this menu, with Eliot's autograph; that I should have kept it bears witness to the aura Eliot's name already had

prominent men and women of letters who at one time or another joined in the Eliot paean[12]. Taken together, the praises of Eliot's singular influence and greatness echo again and again, forming a familiar refrain.

The high esteem and vocal acclaim rang forth not just from famous fellow writers and critics but also from academia's ranks, in countless utterances and innumerable pieces, and, most importantly, I would argue, from the popular press. Consequently, "when T. S. Eliot died in London in 1965, he was widely regarded as the most important poet to have written in English in the twentieth century" (Brooker xiii). That even up until his death (and stretching out for a good period beyond it) Eliot remained that singular "colossus" is a feat that bears repeating for the very fact that Eliot's unprecedented "colossus" status has become so familiar and, thus, seemingly un-noteworthy. After his death in 1965, many among the critical establishment had ceased regarding Eliot (recalling Ozick's terminology) as "pure zenith;" yet he remained *the* literary figure and "permanent luminary," forever "fixed in the firmament" for the majority of the American public. This towering public esteem is perhaps most succinctly articulated in a memorial piece published in *Life* magazine, which ends with the unambiguous final summation: "Our age beyond any doubt has been, and will continue to be, the Age of Eliot" (93).

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for undergraduate poets" (58). For more on Spender and Eliot, see also Leeming, David. *Stephen Spender : A Life in Modernism*. New York: Henry Holt, 1999. (40, 54-57)

[12] This is of course a preliminary and partial list, though not arbitrary. I note these figures by name in part due to their notoriety and significance in Eliot's career but also, on a more pragmatic level, for their respective roles in my ensuing analysis of Eliot's cultural maneuvering.

While not lacking admiring critics and followers, Eliot also did not want for detractors even during his initial rise to prominence, especially amongst his fellow poets and writers. A number of critical studies have explored in great depth a select group of Eliot's contemporaries, most via individual pairings with Eliot cataloguing his changing affinities to one or two other famous figures (primarily Pound, Joyce, Woolf, and Wyndam Lewis) [13]. As so much has been published in this mode already, and as I will deal with Eliot among his contemporary writers directly in my later analysis, I only fleetingly introduce this category of contemporaries here. It is, however, worth providing an example: William Carlos Williams, as he was a particularly pronounced early detractor, waging what one critic referred to as "his Thirty Years' War on Eliot" (Chinitz *Divide* (*Cultural Divide* 144). This "war" began publically very early on with Williams's combative review[14] of Eliot's *Poems* (1919). Concerning Williams's ongoing opposition to Eliot's monumental influence, Jayme Stayer notes, "Even those, who like William Carlos Williams, consciously swam against the tide still had to come to terms with Eliot's work. And Williams had to swim for his life" (303)[15]. Just as his admirers struggled to

[13] Some examples are: Leithauser, Gladys, and Nadine Cowan Dyer. "Bertrand Russell and T.S. Eliot: Their Dialogue." *Russell: the Journal of Bertrand Russell Studies*. 2.1: 7-28.; Marsh, Alec, and Benjamin G. Lockerd. "Pound and Eliot." *American Literary Scholarship*. 2003 (2003): 145-169.; Read, Forrest, ed. *Pound Joyce the Letters of Ezra Pound to James Joyce, with Pound's Essays on Joyce.* New York: New Directions Pub. Corp., 1967.(89,174-175).

[14] First published as "Prologue." *Little Review* 6 (May 1919), 76–78.

[15] See also Brooker, Jewel Spears, ed. *T.S. Eliot: The Contemporary Reviews*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2004. (xvii); Bremen, Brian. *William Carlos Williams and the Diagnostics of Culture*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1993. (179-87).

articulate encomia adequate to pay tribute to Eliot's achievements, Williams derided Eliot with equally vigorous language, referring to *The Waste Land* as "the great catastrophe to our letters" (147).

Williams points to the inseparable linkage of Eliot with his most famous poem. It is so strong a pairing that whenever Eliot's name is invoked, the poem almost instantaneously comes to mind—associating the widely held mythology of the poem with the familiar notion that its publication in 1922 marked a watershed year[16], catapulting Eliot nearly overnight into stratospheric realms of fame and influence. In his 2007 *Critical Companion to T.S. Eliot*, which he calls "as comprehensive a guide to Eliot as has yet been published," Russell Eliot Murphy reinforces the poem's popular narrative, writing:

> Virtually overnight *The Waste Land* became a focal point and rallying cry for the culture wars of its time and brought Eliot a celebrity and iconic status that he would never live down…. Eliot's *The Waste Land* is undoubtedly the most renowned if not notorious literary achievement in poetry in English of the 20th century, a poem […] celebrated … in the contemporary scene of postwar Europe in the early 1920s, a scene of which the poem has by now come to be regarded as a perfect reflection. (ix, 424)

[16] Some examples of popular sources describing 1922 as the height of Modernism are: Abrams, M. H. *A Glossary of Literary Terms*. 7th ed. Fort Worth: Harcourt Brace College Publishers, 1999. (167); Harmon, William, and C. Hugh Holman. *A Handbook to Literature*. 7th ed. Upper Saddle River N.J.: Prentice Hall, 1996. (326).

I quote from Murphy's so-called "most comprehensive" contemporary guide to Eliot's work, which re-inscribes this mythic narrative of *The Waste Land* in establishing Eliot's fame, because one can see how easy it is to attribute an overblown singularity of importance (i.e. "a perfect reflection") in Eliot's career. Jayme Stayer seemingly offers a counter narrative to *The Waste Land's* popular mythology when he writes:

> Anyone familiar with the polemics of the 1920s and 1930s knows that Eliot's impact was simply volcanic. Here is Edmund Wilson in 1922, glancing back at Eliot's achievement so far: 'Mr. T.S. Eliot's first meager volume of twenty-four poems was dropped into the waters of contemporary verse without stirring more than a few ripples. But when two or three years had passed, it was found to stain the whole sea…. His productions … turned out to be unforgettable poems, which everyone was trying to rewrite.' And that's how singularly important Eliot was to modernist poetry *before* he wrote *The Waste Land* (303).

Stayer rightly articulates Eliot's "simply volcanic" impact and influence as predating *The Waste Land*. His couching of Wilson's evocative quotation in establishing this point is, however, rather deceptive. Stayer fails to mention that this quotation, by which he means to establish Eliot's singular impact pre-*Waste Land*, in fact comes from the beginning of Wilson's review of *The Waste Land* published in *The Dial* in December 1922. Directly following the section Stayer quotes, Wilson continues, "There might not be very much of him, but what there was had come somehow to seem precious and now

the publication of his long poem, *The Waste Land*, confirms … that Mr. Eliot, with all his limitations, is one of our only authentic poets. For this new poem … presents itself as so far his most considerable claim to eminence" (611).

While the expanded text and fuller context of Wilson's commentary would on the surface seem to undercut Stayer's use of Wilson in his argument for Eliot's pre-*Waste Land* status, I would argue that Wilson's essay ultimately supports his claim—albeit in a different manner[17]. Clearly, at the surface level, Wilson's text shows today's dominant mythology of *The Waste Land* as a singular and paramount "claim to eminence" being inscribed as early as December 1922. However, just as Stayer makes his point by subtlety leaving out the frame of Wilson's quotation, one likewise finds telling omissions in Wilson's assessment itself. In prefacing his praise of *The Waste Land*, Wilson describes Eliot's volume of poetry as "meagre" and reinforces this sentiment of sparseness, noting there "might not be very much of him." This rhetoric of scarcity appears again with the doubly-diminutive adjective, "precious," and these opinions, taken as whole, indicate that Wilson manages to subtly attribute all of Eliot's output and influence to a handful of "unforgettable poems." The telling omission, one that is especially significant coming from the pen of Edmund Wilson, is Eliot's critical writings,

[17] I deal with Wilson's essay at some length in this introductory section, in part because both his influential position and his critical response exemplify similar responses among the most established of Eliot's contemporary critics of England and America. More specifically, I focus on Wilson here because other portions of this early essay established enduring views of Eliot's public persona and influence, which receive further examination in subsequent sections of my analysis.

the large and perhaps equally influential body of non-poetic output that had amassed by 1922.

One might attribute this omission to the possibility that Wilson was perhaps already sensing consciously or unconsciously the potential of Eliot to eclipse him as England's most important and influential literary critic. Whatever the motive, Wilson's demeanor seems deliberately to serve his own status as discerning literary critic by so craftily parsing only Eliot's sparse poetic output. Though Wilson praises him as "one of our authentic poets," he speaks, in the same breath, of "Mr. Eliot, with all his limitations." Given the tenor of the previous passage, these vague "limitations" may refer simply to the rather mundane and sparse volume of Eliot's other published work when weighed against *The Waste Land.* Wilson rather cunningly extends these faults to include not just Eliot's professional work but also his person—Eliot *the man*. Wilson writes later in the essay: "Mr. Eliot is timid and prosaic like Mr. Prufrock; he has no capacity for life, and nothing which happens to Mr. Prufrock can be important. Well: all these objections are founded on realities, but they are outweighed by one major fact—the fact that Mr. Eliot is a poet" (615). Whatever Eliot's failings and limitations, Wilson is clearly at pains to show they are those of *a poet*. After (re-)establishing this principal "one major fact," Wilson feels compelled to reiterate it, just a few lines later, sounding, it would seem, needlessly repetitious and insistent. He persists:, "And, as I say, Mr. Eliot is a poet—that is, he feels intensely and with distinction and speaks naturally in beautiful verse" (615).

Why such insistence from Wilson on the seemingly a priori "fact" that "Mr. Eliot is a poet?" Cultural critic Jewel Spears Brooker provides a rather definitive answer to this question in describing Eliot's exceptionally varied and prolific early-career writings:

> [Eliot's] second group of poems was published in 1919/1920 in three overlapping books—*Poems*, *Ara Vos Prec*, and *Poems* (1920). His first book of criticism—*The Sacred Wood*—appeared at the same time. The combination of opaque and avant-garde poetry with translucent and authoritative prose puzzled some readers and dazzled others. From this time forward, Eliot's reception as poet and his authority as critic would be indissolubly linked.(xvii-xviii)

Looking back from our 21st century-vantage point, overshadowed by the popular mythology of the 1922 publication of *The Waste Land,* it is perhaps easy to overlook the equally significant impact of Eliot's other early-career critical writings, whether resulting from an unconscious adoption of *The Waste Land's* mystique or the deliberate foregrounding/obfuscating of "Eliot as poet" put forth by Wilson and others. The back-cover blurb on my tattered, third-hand 1960 University Paperbacks version of *The Sacred Wood* offers an apt reminder: "This collection of papers on poetry and criticism was *as much a bombshell* [emphasis added] as was the *Waste Land*, published two years later.

The book, more than any other single work of criticism written by a living writer, has influenced our generation's critical methods" (*Sacred Wood*).[18]

Though Wilson expediently tried early on to cast Eliot within the confines of the poet's "role," it soon became clear that such a limited mold could not contain Eliot's influence, no matter how carefully crafted or subtly worded. That Wilson felt compelled to write such a critique in and of itself adds to Eliot's stature. Whether borne of awe, fear, envy, hatred, confusion, or mere surprise, Eliot would force not just Wilson but several of England's and America's most prominent "professional" critics to grapple with the unparalleled achievement and influence that he embodied. As Eliot operated in so many modes, one can easily add to the six individual emotions I listed above, and this is important. For a figure so often construed as aloof, devoid of emotion, sterile, and intellectual, Eliot manages, indeed seems to demand, a very personal, emotive response from his audience.

Furthermore, in the same manner that Eliot gained currency via output that is both exceptionally prolific and variegated, he rarely elicits a simple, singular emotional response. Rather, Eliot educes diverse, contradictory, and shifting reactions from his vast audience, charting a convoluted path across the emotive register, "mixing memory and desire," conjuring praises of the highest elation gradually quieted with confounding byzantine formulations. In an oft-quoted passage, William Empson surmises "I do not know for certain how much of my own mind [Eliot] invented, let alone how much of it is

[18] Eliot, T. S. *The Sacred Wood: Essays on Poetry and Criticism*. 3rd ed. London: Methuen, 1960. The back blurb is attributed to "Harvey Breit *New York Times.*"'

a reaction against him or indeed a consequence of misreading him. He is a very penetrating influence, perhaps not unlike the east wind" ("The Style of the Master" 35). Empson's proverbial east wind is noteworthy not only for the significant sway that Eliot held, seemingly independent from the most prominent and nuanced literary critics of his time[19] but also in its suggestion of a kind of hybrid, perhaps boundless, aspect that characterized Eliot's influence.

This influence pushed beyond the confines of Modernist poetry and "literary criticism into the larger, multifarious field of cultural studies, indeed of "culture" itself. In *Culture and Society, 1780-1950* (for a time, and certainly for some still *the* landmark cultural studies text), Raymond Williams notes that "if Eliot is read with attention, he is seen to have raised questions which those who differ from him politically must answer, or else retire from the field. In particular, in his discussion of culture, he has carried the argument to an important stage, and one on which the rehearsal of old pieces will be merely tedious" (243). Though Williams ultimately argues for a markedly different

[19] In addition to Empson, one could add a host of other critical "giants" of the period grappling with Eliot. Louis Menand singles out "I.A. Richards, F.R. Leavis, Cleanth Brooks, René Wellek, and W.K. Wimsatt" (165). One could certainly add to this list (among others) Edmund Wilson, Northrop Frye, Frank Kermode, Malcolm Cowley, and Hugh Kenner. For distillations of a number of their critical views on Eliot, See Grant, Michael, ed. *T.S. Eliot, the Critical Heritage*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1982, and Brooker, Jewel Spears, ed. *T.S. Eliot: The Contemporary Reviews*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2004.

It is also worth noting that in Empson's oft-quoted "proverbial east wind," Eliot's paramount critical influence in general trumps the specific, localized context of Eliot's influence on Empson. For example, The Poetry Foundation's introductory essay on Eliot informs its readers, "F.R. Leavis called him 'a very penetrating influence, perhaps not unlike the east wind,'" mistakenly (and tellingly) substituting one major critic for another. ("Hamlet by T. S. Eliot")

construction of the cultural realm than that attributed to Eliot, he locates any significant discussion of culture as beginning with Eliot. Expressed another way, in the more geographic, spatial language characteristic of cultural studies, Eliot both delineates (at least as when one approaches the discipline via the supremely influential Williams) boundaries and positions the landmarks of the entire discipline.

Williams, like Eliot, possessed a preternatural fluency with words. Both verbalize personal visions of culture so compelling that they defined and reshaped the world of actual, lived experience. Prodigious poet, critic, and cultural icon, Williams suggests yet another of the many hats the mercurial Eliot can don—master rhetorician. For Williams, Eliot searches out and asks *the* fundamental questions, matters of such great import that one must, by necessity, approach through Eliot; every other road leads to one of two destinations—either a forced early retirement or a roundabout, in which one is stuck needlessly retreading the same loop, in motion but never advancing.

Williams writes an exceptionally lengthy and exceedingly passive, conditional construction "if Eliot is read with attention, he is seen to have raised questions which those who differ from him politically must answer. . ." (227). Though drawn out, the axiom appears sound. It certainly *sounds* indisputable. Of course, by this logic Eliot's position becomes rather unassailable as it doesn't matter how his questions are answered; if Eliot is wrong he's still "right" for having defined the frontier, for having rhetorically framed the terms of the debate. Should one disagree, he or she is likely not reading Eliot "with [enough] attention."

Frank Lentricchia adds another dimension to Eliot's unique hold and dominance over American and British letters for the greater part of a century, noting, "with Eliot's cultural charisma and force, with the mystique of his poetry, with the career that was undergirded and sustained by an amazingly successful series of landmark essays (one after the other), big boulders in the stream of twentieth century literature which none could afford to ignore—with this reputation, this image, none could compete" (240). The operative word here is "image," which suggests the essential, though nearly always neglected, *visual* elements of Eliot's artistry, a dynamic but deliberate composition that Eliot both maintained and subtly revised throughout his career. This image deteriorated along with Eliot's health, and after Eliot's death, the light cast from the once seemingly "permanent luminary" quickly began to fade. In contrast to the effusing American memorial in *Life* ("Our age beyond any doubt has been, and will continue to be, the Age of Eliot"), Eliot's obituary in the *London Times* was entitled "The Most Influential English Poet of His Time." The *Times'* title, while certainly suggestive of Eliot's influence and importance, perhaps, more perceptively, confines that influence and grandeur to "His Time"—a bygone era belonging to a now-dead figurehead. From this historical point and perspective, whatever age the world found itself in, it most certainly would *not* "continue to be the Age of Eliot."

Eliot Now

"In a culture that now seems long ago and far, far away, T. S. Eliot was a rock star" (E5). So begins a recent review by *New York Times* critic Michiko Kakutani of yet another book on T.S. Eliot. Very few 20th century writers have been examined by literary critics with more frequency and tenacity than Eliot. Presently, any would-be Eliot scholar reviewing the history of Eliot criticism finds himself confronted with volume upon volume to maze through: biographies, lectures, memoirs, bibliographic collections, scattered correspondence, scholarly exegeses of every size and stripe, and recontexutalization upon recontextualization—indeed, a treacherous sea of spilled ink that upon first encounter seems to confound any further contribution. As one critic recently notes, "walk into *any* university or college library, look up T. S. Eliot in the catalogue, and you will be confronted with many shelves and banks of books by and about him [emphasis added]" (Cooper ix). This observation is certainly true at the University of Texas at Austin where I have studied and taught for the past several years. Our main library has multiple shelves containing hundreds of Eliot-related volumes, of which I've had several dozen checked out for the past few years. Though, tellingly, in all these years, I've not received a single recall request from another patron. So while you can walk into any library and find a large body of Eliot on the shelves, I would conjecture that this corpus remains there unnoticed and undisturbed, Eliot now a forgotten "old man driven…/ to a sleepy corner" of the stacks collecting dust. Eliot does in many ways

seem a relic of the past, a mere footnoted gerontic, surpassed and properly left alone to fade away.

Eliot and his poetry which initially bulled over the establishment with new forms, dark musical rhythms, and polyvocal utterances, once infamously novel, dense, difficult, are now considered old-hat; after decades of meticulous New-critical scholarship and required classroom instruction all of Eliot's allusions have been chased down, his once-bold illicitness made chaste, and his wild musical lines and varied influences and source materials tamed—unearthed, (re)-examined, noted, and notated.

Even if one puts aside the many pages of tired New Critical re-hashing, the mere passage of time, now more than four decades since his death, has itself greatly diminished Eliot's currency. Furthermore, the acerbic denouncements from academic critics and succeeding generations of poets have rendered him a cast-off thing of the past. British poet and critic Clive Wilmer writes:

> At the beginning of the twenty-first century, the work of T.S. Eliot could hardly be called fashionable or even influential. It has taken some hard knocks in recent years and prominent contemporary poets…no longer refer to the old master with the awe that was once reserved for him … the prevailing poetic 'voice' of our own day is 'democratic': from which we are to understand a contrast with the high Modernists, who are felt to be "elitist", authoritarian and Eurocentric. (15)

The disavowal of Eliot based upon a perceived elitist and undemocratic spirit extends not just to prominent poets, but even into the mainstream of literary criticism: Harold Bloom, perhaps the most famous literary critic of recent times. Despite the fact that some have leveled the similar charges at Bloom—the Yale-bred, autocratic elitist, nothing seems to deter Bloom from repeatedly castigating Eliot for this sin, at times going further to co-characterize Eliot as a bigoted tyrant. For example he recalls Eliot's mid-century influence, "Anyone adopting the profession of teaching literature in the early nineteen fifties entered a discipline virtually *enslaved* not only by Eliot's insights but by the *entire* span of his preferences and *prejudices*" (emphasis added) ("Introduction, T. S. Eliot" 1).

I single out Bloom's criticism for a sustained analysis vis-à-vis Eliot because given his lengthy career in the public spotlight he's in many ways a representative, very highly recognizable exemplar of the shifting critical view of Eliot through the decades: exposing characteristic shifts, limitations, and contradictions in academic estimations of Eliot and his work. More tellingly, however, Bloom stands out additionally telling through deliberate fashioning himself into a larger-than-life literary critic and in his fixation with distancing himself from the rabble below.

Bloom is often written off as a one-trick pony. In 1976 Christopher Ricks pithily concluded, "Bloom had an idea; now the idea has him" (Ricks, "Poetry and Repression" BR2). Likewise, the introduction to a special recent issue of *Modern Language Quarterly* devoted to Bloom points out that "the perceived shortcomings of his work

have long been well rehearsed" (Elfenbein 433)[20.] Now having lived into his eighties, the doddering, aged Bloom has lost much of his former renown, but he impressively maintained a formidable multi-decade notoriety, cannily projecting the aloofness of genius, (re)articulating his own brand of 'timeless' critique centered around a central concept of "influence," while simultaneously insisting upon the currency of his critical pronouncements. By the numbers he's now published more than forty books, authored countless articles, and when examined in detail, nearly invariably provokes multi-dimensional responses, at times explicitly: discharging lengthy, exceptionally baroque, often strikingly florid elucidations, at other times, implicitly: intimating mystic forethought from behind a silent languishing stare, and upon encountering opposition from others, summarily dismissing them with a gesture of disdain or perhaps mumbling some cryptic aphorism. In a move that I'm sure he would not begrudge me, I'll also suggest Bloom the literary critic shares certain affinities with Joyce's Bloom; both are hyper-allusive, cunning, perceptive, and stretching the comparison to its furthest limits, one might even say both have become infamous characters, steeped in myth. Most importantly, I mean to highlight that like Leopold Bloom, Harold Bloom when subjected to scrutiny, rewards on many levels, particularly in regard to T.S. Eliot and my ensuing

[20] In addition to Ricks' review essay see for example, Robert Douglas-Fairhurst, Victorian Afterlives: The Shaping of Influence in Nineteenth-Century Literature (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002); Fry, Paul H. "How to Live with the Infinite Regress of Strong Misreading." *Modern Language Quarterly* 69.4 (2008): 437-459; and for a compelling problematizing of Bloom's core concepts of inheritance and tradition, see Varadharajan, Asha. "The Unsettling Legacy of Harold Bloom's Anxiety of Influence." *Modern Language Quarterly* 69.4 (2008): 461-480.

composite analysis. I'll ask, learned reader, that you seek out the variegated insights and connections contained in my analysis, some of which (in a deliberately Bloomian fashion) I'll spell out explicitly and some of which will remain implicit.

In *T.S. Eliot: Modern Critical Views* (1985), a volume that Bloom edited, he disparages Eliot's "cultural position, self proclaimed as Anglo-Catholic, Royalist and Classical," adjectives that for Bloom describe a backward, non-progressive, and non-inclusive position ("Introduction, T. S. Eliot" 1). Even though Bloom takes issue with Eliot's "cultural position," he finds certain elements of Eliot's poetry to celebrate and argues for Eliot's continued contemporary influence and relevance, writing:

> Eliot's influence as a poet is by no means spent, yet it seems likely that Robert Penn Warren's later poetry . . . will be the final stand of Eliot's extraordinary effort to establish an anti-Romantic counter-Sublime sense of *the* tradition to replace the continuity of Romantic tradition. That the continuity now has absorbed him is hardly a defeat; absorption is not rejection, and Eliot's poetry is securely in the canon. (*Modern Critical Views* 6)

Moving ahead seventeen years, in *Genius* (2002), Bloom offers a less congenial summary of Eliot's contemporary influence, stating:

> [T]here is also the question of Eliot's influence, which was international. Critically, this has dwindled, but once was enormous. The influence of the poetry, as late as the mid-century was equally fierce, but is now spent.

> . . .Notoriously, he asserted that his precursors were Dante and Baudelaire, or even minor French poets, rather than anyone before him who had written in English. But that is the usual poetic spiel: the central forerunners of The Waste Land are Whitman's "When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloom'd" and Tennyson's Maud: A Monodrama. Eliot also liked to cite lesser Jacobean dramatists, John Webster and Cyril Tourneur, but his actual poetry is haunted by Hamlet, which he hilariously dubbed an "aesthetic failure." So it goes: trust the poem and not the poet. (*Genius* 371)

Thus in Bloom's estimation, Eliot's poetic influence, which some twenty years ago was "by no means spent," (*Modern Critical Views* 6) diminishes to its current position where it is, unequivocally, "now spent" (*Genius* 371).

Bloom comes to find very little left of Eliot's poetic influence in a contemporary environment, and is even more dismissive of Eliot's "cultural position," variously disavowed as being "neo-Christian," "Old Right," and the aforementioned "Anglo-Catholic, Royalist and Classical." For Bloom, Eliot's "cultural position" means not so much the actual position of cultural influence occupied by Eliot, as it does Bloom's interpretation of Eliot's "critical" or "cultural" writings, Bloom dismisses as "mere snobbery" (371) One might see a bit of the sin he attributes to Eliot's critical writings with his description, "as for what now would be called his cultural criticism, I grimace and pass by" (*Genius* 372). As with Eliot's criticism, Bloom summarily dispatches Eliot's

drama from his critical radar: “I set aside Eliot’s verse plays, which are scarcely stageable or readable.”

Indeed, after all of his dismissals, little remains of Eliot’s corpus in Bloom’s construction. Bloom writes, “his early poetry is mostly very good, up through 1925 or so. There remained forty years, of which the monument is *Four Quartets*. Remarkable passages abide in it, and a certain quantity of stuffing. Essentially, Eliot had a poetic decade, 1915-25, in the tradition of Wordsworth and Whitman, each of whom had a great decade and then subsided.” Coupled with his other commentaries on Eliot’s writing, one finds that Bloom reduces any of Eliot’s non-poetic work and all of his writings and cultural work post 1925 as nothing more than “a certain quantity of stuffing” and, one must assume, bilious stuffing at that.

It is instructive to speculate on the implications of Bloom’s increasingly dour estimation of Eliot’s poetic influence as well as his sustained dismissal of Eliot’s “cultural position” and “critical” writings. In his review article, “Bloom and the Great Ones,” William Kerrigan observes, “like an Emerson paragraph, Harold Bloom keeps reinventing himself” and goes on to chronicle Bloom’s various changes throughout his career, going from “first the exegete of Blake, Wordsworth, and Shelley,” to “in the 1970s a Freudian theorist, proposing his famous doctrine of the anxiety of influence,” eventually transforming “into a resourceful Americanist” (195). Kerrigan then cites a crucial turn in Bloom’s career in the early 1980’s:

> Around the time of *Agon: Towards a Theory of Revisionism* (1982), his prose shed much of its jargon, his interests expanded unpredictably, and his ambition looked upward. He would become the Dr. Johnson of our age. Aided by teams of graduate students, he edited a large number of anthologies collecting the best literary criticism on major British and American authors. As he chose and printed his critical canon, Bloom's own books ceased to address an academic audience. (195)

Kerrigan faults Bloom for not addressing an academic audience (including this jibe further along in his essay: "Bloom has not written a footnote for around thirty years"), but I find his summation that Bloom's output since the early eighties "ceased to address an academic audience" problematically equivocal. While the structure, marketing, and to a certain extent content of Bloom's more recent work rhetorically addresses a "non-academic" audience, the content and impetus behind these works is still very much concerned with the academic environment of literary studies; it is merely an "address" of a different sort. After all, the fact that Kerrigan publishes an academic article reviewing Bloom's latest publication counters Kerrigan's assertion, and establishes by its very existence, an academic address, even if it operates at a level removed as a kind of meta-discourse in the academy. Kerrigan cites a critical point in Bloom's career when his ambitions looked upward and he sought to become "The Dr. Johnson of our age" (195). Further in his essay, Kerrigan suggests other literary-critical parallels for Bloom, "I think he would like to be our Freud, our Emerson, our Bible. But for the time being, I expect,

he would settle for being our Gnostic Frye, and that is his main bid in The Western Canon" (196). I would suggest that Eliot, despite Bloom's numerous disavowals of Eliot, might be a more apt parallel. Kerrigan awards Bloom "the title of supreme academic humorist of our day" quoting a humorous passage where Bloom canonizes himself as the "true Marxist critic":

> I am your true Marxist critic, following Groucho rather than Karl, and take as my motto Groucho's grand admonition, "Whatever it is, I'm against it!" I have been against, in turn, the neo-Christian New Criticism of T. S. Eliot and his academic follower; the deconstruction of Paul de Man and his clones; the current rampages of New Left and Old Right on the supposed inequities, and even more dubious moralities, of the literary Canon. (Bloom 520; Kerrigan 197)

I suggest Eliot as a more apt parallel with my tongue nearing my cheek. Bloom, the critic whose most famous literary doctrine was the Oedipal "anxiety of influence," is also the doddering cultural arbiter who so deliberately and summarily dismisses Eliot's "critical" writings and "cultural position." The appeal of suggesting that he might be masquerading as the rogue, academic humorist, might be merely expressing "unconscious" fears that his cultural work was in fact not that different from the supposedly dour, "Royalist and Classical" Eliot proves too tempting to dismiss. I am not suggesting a Freudian analysis where one searches out unconscious motives evidenced in Bloom's criticisms to reveal a repressed burning, jealousy of Eliot—that is after all, his

department. What I am suggesting is that when examining Bloom's recent literary criticism, that one can see a mode of criticism in practice that functions in a manner very amenable to, and with concerns quite similar to, the role and function of literature and literary criticism as expressed in Eliot's "critical writings" and "cultural position." In Eliot's most famous essay, "Tradition and the Individual Talent," he writes:

> No poet, no artist of any art, has his complete meaning alone. His significance, his appreciation is the appreciation of his relation to the dead poets and artists. You cannot value him alone; you must set him, for contrast and comparison, among the dead. I mean this as a principle of aesthetic, not merely historical criticism. (28)

Throughout Bloom's critical writings, one sees an ongoing task of aesthetically examining writers by placing them in relation to each other, and his assessment of Eliot is no exception. Very generally, Bloom marks Eliot as "a poet of singular genius, though scarcely comparable in eminence to Dante and to Blake" (*Genius* 370). More specifically, Bloom construes Eliot by placing him in various literary lineages with greater and lesser degrees of prominence: Eliot's early poetry marks him as "the legitimate inheritor of Tennyson, and of Whitman," but as a devotional Christian poet, Bloom surmises, "Eliot cannot sustain comparison with George Herbert or even with Christina Rosetti" (Bloom, *Genius* 369, 371).

From these unfavorable general comparisons, Bloom moves to more direct and favorable comparisons of Eliot with Tennyson and Whitman. Examining section VI of "Ash Wednesday," Bloom writes:

> This is one of Eliot's triumphs, as an earliness is recovered under the sign of contrition. The "unbroken wings" still flying seaward are a beautiful metalepsis of the wings of section I, which were "merely vans to beat the air." A characteristic pattern of the Romantic crisis lyric is extended as the precursors return from the dead, but in Eliot's own colors, the "lost lilac" of Whitman and the "lost sea voices" of Tennyson, joining Eliot's "lost heart" in the labor of rejoicing, having indeed constructed something upon which to rejoice. (4)

For Bloom, Eliot's triumph in "Ash Wednesday" comes about not through some innovative and startlingly original new poetic mode, but rather through a creative engagement with "tradition" —the Romantic tropes and specific poetry of Whitman and Tennyson. In another example—this Bloom's most effusive expression of praise for Eliot—he writes of *The Waste Land*, "It is as though Eliot had assimilated Bram Stoker's *Dracula* to Tennyson's "Mariana" or *Maud*, with a touch of Oscar Wilde's *Salome* thrown in. Only a genius of exacerbated sensibility could have given us this unnerving splendor" (*Genius* 73). Here Bloom praises Eliot for a bold creative synthesis or reforging of past heroic poetic achievements, a maneuver Eliot found to be admirable if not fundamental for any would-be poet when he explains that a poet, "should subject

himself to as many influences as possible, in order to escape from any one influence … maturing consists largely of the taking in and digesting various influences" (13). Elsewhere, in "Tradition and the Individual Talent," Eliot writes:

> What happens when a new work of art is created is something that happens simultaneously to all the works of art which preceded it. The existing monuments form an ideal order among themselves, which is modified by the introduction of the new (the really new) work of art among them. The existing order is complete before the new work arrives; for the order to persist after the supervention of novelty, the *whole* existing order must be, if ever so slightly, altered; and so the relations, proportions, values of each work of art toward the whole are readjusted; and this is conformity between the old and the new.(38-39)

One notices how closely this sentiment parallels with Bloom as he describes Eliot's achievement in *The Waste Land*: "Eliot's strength is felt now when we read 'When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloom'd' and 'Maud: A Monodrama,' and find ourselves believing that they are influenced by *The Waste Land"* (13). The poem reshapes the order around itself so that with its insertion into the literary tradition, it achieves a kind of primacy in the canon, despite its chronological location, even if only in the minds of certain readers.

This is not to say that Bloom's criticism functions exactly like Eliot's. After all, Eliot was concerned with Christian Society and "an ideal order" and non-combative

harmonious relationship among literary works, while Bloom performs criticism with a scriptural basis in the Kabala rather than the New Testament. Eliot explains that "tradition" is a matter of significance and cautions, "it cannot be inherited, and if you want it you must obtain it by great labour" ("Tradition and the Individual Talent" 49). For Bloom, grappling with the inherited literary tradition is a matter of great labor, but as the title of his most famous critical doctrine, "The Anxiety of Influence" suggests, the labor is of a much more personal, psychological milieu. This psychological foundation, coupled with a staunch insistence on the text alone (once Bloom's innovative contribution to literary theory), now seems a calling card of his critical limitations. One sees this perhaps most readily in the way that Bloom's insistence on finding an Oedipal father figure for Eliot shows his criticism at its most strained. He presents a highly debatable, psychological argument, asserting, "though Eliot and Stevens consciously did not feel or know it, their poetry is obsessed with Whitman's poetry," and later, "Whitman, in Eliot's own true sense of 'influence,' remained always Eliot's hidden poetic father" (2). Bloom uses this instance of Oedipal influence to radically (mis)construe Eliot's most influential poem:

> Eliot's 'third who always walks beside you," the risen Christ according to *The Waste Land*'s notes, is either Whitman's "thought of death" or "knowledge of death," or both fused together. *The Waste Land*, like "Lilacs," begins to seem more an elegy for the poet's own genius, rather

> than a lament for Western civilization. Eliot gives us another grand song of death, or of the death-in-life that is poetic crisis. (373)

Bloom not only counters Eliot's own specific gloss of the poem's symbolism to fit into his gospel of the anxiety of influence, but also incalculably narrows the scope of *The Waste Land*—from the commonly understood postwar dirge of collective societal fragmentation, isolation, and decrepitude into a highly personal, psychological crisis of poetic psychology. Even if one overlooks the problematic conclusions that Bloom draws from his trademark intertextual, psychological reading of *The Waste Land*, one cannot ignore the larger limitations inherent in Bloom's methodology. In relying on only the poem itself and the idiosyncratic psychological genesis that Bloom posits, he misses what surely remains the most important import of Eliot and *The Waste Land*: the unparalleled *cultural* influence that poem and the poet engenders. Critic Adam Begley captures Bloom's key fault, citing his mode "limited by his refusal to relate works of literature to their particular cultural and historical moment" (SM32).

Begley also notes, "Many younger academics think of Bloom as an outdated oddity, a critic who once made a significant contribution to literary theory but who hasn't budged since. The surface dazzle of his writing, decked out with rhapsodic effusion and cutting wit, can make him seem like a glib showman spicing up a tired act" (SM32). Whether or not one shares in Begley's assessment of Bloom, he too, like Eliot has surely experienced a diminishing influence, no longer commanding the authority he once enjoyed. From a contemporary academic standpoint, however, perhaps the most

penetrating and forceful element in Eliot's diminution comes from this group of "younger academics" and the seemingly *inherent* dismissal of Eliot's influence and oeuvre from the dominant modes of literary and cultural criticism now practiced in the discipline with its primary focus of issues of race, gender, class, and sexuality. A number of critics working in the contemporary paradigm have simply ignored Eliot as an irrelevancy, or if dealt with at all, recast him as at best hopelessly passé, or more commonly demonized him as a narrow-minded, sexist elitist. In his book *Women in the Poetry of T. S. Eliot*, Tony Pinkney construes Eliot's work as full of "misogynistic and psychotic themes" (159). Most damaging among academics, the last charge has been especially detrimental to Eliot's legacy, in large part to Anthony Julius' 1995 book *T.S. Eliot, Anti-Semitism, and Literary Form* where he summarily asserts in the books' opening lines, "Anti-Semites are not all the same. Some break Jewish bones, others wound Jewish sensibilities. Eliot falls into the second category … if the work, or some notable part of it is anti-Semitic, it is the work of an anti-Semite" (1). Along the same lines, biographer Lyndall Gordon's revised biography of Eliot *T.S. Eliot: An Imperfect Life* (1998), along with a host of other critical commentaries, have beleaguered Eliot's legacy with similar aspersions. As Roger Kimball writes in his book, *Experiments Against Reality: The Fate of Culture in the Postmodern Age* (2000), "Gordon also predictably expatiates on Eliot's anti-Semitism—a growth industry these days—going so far as to say that 'he did not hold back from the mass-prejudice that played a part in the largest atrocity of the century'" (72-73). The quotation from Gordon presents Eliot not

merely as a stuffy, old anti-Semite, but as a much more ghastly and repugnant figure, one if not deliberately embracing, than at least implicit in the macabre horrors of Nazism and genocide—a charge that if taken to heart seems to render Eliot and his legacy not so much as innocuous and irrelevant but as terminated and irredeemable.

I excerpt the previous quotation from Kimball's chapter on Eliot, "A Craving For Reality: T.S. Eliot Today." Eliot's status "today" might be summed up with Kimball's four-word chapter preface, as he turns Eliot's familiar invocation of Conrad back upon its invoker to read: "Mistah Eliot—he dead" (61). If indeed Eliot is dead (as a source of academic study) with so many piercing books and articles from the last decade acting as the proverbial nails in his coffin[21], looking two decades back, one finds, to extend the metaphor, the coffin, or perhaps more accurately the hammer itself—Cynthia Ozick's 1989 *New Yorker* article "T.S. Eliot at 101." The form of the title is familiar to regular readers of *The New Yorker* as it often prints similarly titled "birthday articles" though these generally show up as much shorter pieces that celebrate famous figures from the past; most often these form a sort of tribute, and are anecdotal and humorous, or argue a fresh new perspective on the relevance of, or call for a renewed interest in the figure depicted. Ozick's title also recalls a series of nearly universally celebratory and honorific, if not deifying articles and collections published decades earlier to mark both Eliot's 70th and his 75th birthdays. Though in stark contrast to these earlier tributes as

[21] Though one might take note that the very existence of so many books celebrating/asserting the death of Eliot, give his work a currency, even if expressed in decidedly negative terms, he still remains a specter haunting the critical landscape.

well as to the usual laudatory tenor of other *New Yorker* "birthday" pieces, Ozick disparages Eliot, delivering wallop after wallop to Eliot's once-thought unassailable legacy. As the acerbic piece was so widely read upon publication, (and remains by far the most often cited article in recent Eliot criticism), it effectually put Eliot in his place, an "autocratic, inhibited, depressed, rather narrow-minded, and considerably bigoted fake Englishman" (121). Ozick so summarily dismisses Eliot not just for his personal faults, but more tellingly due to her poststructuralist vantage point, a world in which, to quote further, "high art is dead. The passion for inheritance is dead. Tradition is equated with obscurantism. The wall that divided serious high culture from the popular arts is breached" (121) and in such a context Eliot studies become an anachronism, his "elegiac fragments … too arcane, too aristocratic, and too difficult for contemporary ambition" (121).

Further deconstructing Ozick's above formulations, though, one begins to problematize her too hasty dismissal of Eliot, or (waxing poststructuralist), upon closer examination, one hears something a bit too hollow in her ringing death knell, and discovers problematic breaks amidst her celebratory breach. When she finds Eliot "too difficult for contemporary ambition," it is, of course, not that current scholastic ambition/aims/work are marked by an aversion to "difficulty" per se and not that literary studies have somehow slid into sloth, shirking any inquiry that is demanding or complex, but, rather, something quite the opposite. The postmodern correlative to the infamous three-word modernist credo "make it new" might be distilled to one singular directive:

"problematize." Whatever the particular school and stripe of poststructuralist literary studies one adopts, the pervasive impulse is towards 'difficulty,' whether it be discovering the strange and telling in the seemingly trite and unremarkable, craftily queering the canon, painstakingly strip-mining surfaces unearthing deeply hidden motives and (e)motions, ulterior agendas and ambitions. Thus, returning to Ozick's formulation, Eliot has turned "too difficult for contemporary ambition" not so much because Eliot has changed, but because the ambitions of contemporary criticism have seemingly passed him by. Reading further, Ozick dismisses Eliot as "too difficult" not so much along the first half of the linguistic binary of difficult/simple, but, recalling the previous portion of her sentence, "difficult" by being bound in the styntagmatic chain with "arcane" and "aristocratic," another strand in a list of modifiers that one might more accurately define as irrelevant, outré, indeed, unproblematic or not-difficult-enough, when reflected through the mirror of the aims/drives/concerns of what current critical practices seek after: "contemporary ambition."

Ambition. If Ozick and others have dismissed Eliot from behind the purview of contemporary academic aims and ambition, he has perhaps even more often been disabused as a once-dominant figure whose meteoric rise owed less to any sort of literary novelty or genius, and more to an dogged, self-serving will to power: a cool, calculated climb up the ladder of the literary establishment, cruelly treading not just upon the backs of other writers and colleagues, but more unsettlingly, at the expense of his closest friends, his most trusted confidantes, even his own family. In short, the "contemporary

ambitions" of modern scholarship ultimately disparage Eliot's own preternatural ambition—though in this instance *ambition*, with emphasis on the unsavory connotations contained in the word's etymological roots:

> a. Fr. *ambition* (14th c. in Litt.), ad. L. *ambiti n-em*, n. of action f. *amb - re* to go round or about (see AMBIT), 1. going round, 2. going round to canvass for votes, 3. eager desire of honour, etc., 4. ostentation, pomp, 5. earnest desire generally. Of these, meaning 3 was first adopted in the modern languages; 2 is a later literary adoption directly from Latin. ("Ambition, N.")

In the dominant narrative, Eliot gets castigated for, 'in a word,' ambition—relentlessly "making the rounds" of ever widening circles, first at Harvard then in Europe, a clever rounder always eager to ingratiate himself with the right players, canvassing for votes (for himself) especially among those in positions of greater influence and power, doggedly in search of those that could boost his climb to the ultimate heights of hono*u*r, prestige, and pomp.

Indeed, the calculating and serpentine Eliot not only made the rounds himself, he also got others to do the dirty work of soliciting on his behalf, even from his very earliest days. To cite one example, Eliot famously found a disciple and collaborator in Ezra Pound, who in an oft-quoted letter informed Eliot's skeptical family about his doubly unpopular marriage to Vivienne and his resolve to live the life of a man of letters. As biographer Peter Ackroyd recounts, "only two days after the wedding, Ezra Pound was

writing on his instructions to Henry Ware Eliot, and in the letter he attempted to justify the 'literary life' and suggested that the prospects for Henry's son were very hopeful" (65). And, as the story goes, after helping quash the doubts of Eliot's overbearing parents, Pound bulldozed Eliot's name and poetry into print, "distributing Eliot's poetry to anyone who cared to look at it. He had already sent 'Prufrock' to Harriet Monroe, and was in April 1915 nagging her to publish it: "'*Do* get on with that Eliot,' he wrote. Reluctantly she did so, and it appeared in the Chicago magazine, *Poetry,* in June 1915" (65). Despite the essential role Pound undoubtedly plays in Eliot's rise to prominence, Eliot, many have argued, reveals his 'true character,' when examined closely: furtively viewing Pound, like so many other of his contemporaries, with a decided disinterestedness if not cool disdain, as merely another pawn in his grand scheme. Ackroyd captures this characteristic well, contrasting the two figures:

> Pound asked Eliot to send him some poems. "Prufrock" and "Portrait," along with some others, arrived and Pound told him, "This is as good as anything I've ever seen. Come around and have a talk about them." Pound then wrote almost at once to Harriet Monroe, the editor of the Chicago magazine Poetry for which he was "foreign correspondent," and informed her that Eliot 'has sent the best poem I have yet had or seen from an American. . . . He actually trained himself and modernized himself on his own." On the same day, Eliot was writing in decidedly less

> enthusiastic terms about Pound's work, which… he thought of little merit. (65)

Eliot, was of course, elsewhere effusively praiseful of Pound's work both publicly and privately. As time went on, Eliot further vacillated; critics as well as fellow poets enumerate instances of this sort of seedy hypocrisy as Eliot turns alternately cool or even disparaging in his assessments, dependent upon, presumably the correspondent/audience addressed and the calculated effect his remarks would have on furthering his own ambitions. Conrad Aiken, Eliot's former classmate (as well as the unnamed recipient of Eliot's above-mentioned letter terming Pound's work "of little merit") describes with both exasperation and awe a number of incidents of such two-faced behavior in Eliot's dealings, even ultimately finding "a streak of sadism" fueling ambitious meanderings (qtd. in Ackroyd 236). Critic Herbert Howarth reports, "Conrad Aiken, remembering the early years of the *Criterion*, has said that from time to time a literary 'assassination' was deliberately planned and executed. Though striving for higher things, the first thing Eliot acquired … was the art of assassination" (185) .

A number of critics and biographers point the starkly divergent paths, especially noting the vast disparity in the career trajectory of the two initial collaborators at mid-century—Pound disenfranchised, incarcerated, and despised; Eliot decorated, celebrated, dominant, and influential to a seemingly unthinkable degree—sometimes implicitly and often explicitly suggesting Eliot used Pound to get a leg up, and, when convenient,

distanced himself from "the greater craftsman," privileging the upward trajectory of his career to the responsibilities of friendship. Gail McDonald notes:

> Pound moved further and further to the margins of intellectual life as Eliot became more central. His authority having metamorphosed into solipsism, Pound was capricious, often incomprehensible possibly insane. Despite what he had done in the 1910s and 1920s to revitalize and reauthorize poetry, he did not make a presentable public appearance on the lecture platform like his colleague Eliot. (203-04)

In *T.S. Eliot and the Art of Collaboration* Richard Badenhausen points out how "the two men adopt poses appropriate to their different levels of investment in the relationship. Pound, having risked his substantial capital, must talk up the value of his asset; conversely, Eliot, with little reputation to risk, is free to disparage his sponsor's work" (73).[22] Though Pound is the most famous and oft-cited example, and though he himself may have proved too formidable, talented, and vital to fall victim to 'literary assassination,' he has been counted as just one among many contemporaries cleverly

[22] In addition quotations I cite above from McDonald and Badenhausen regarding the divergent careers of Eliot and Pound see: Barnhisel, Greg. *James Laughlin, New Directions, and the Remaking of Ezra Pound*. Cambridge, Mass: Univ of Massachusetts Press, 2005. (236); Seymour-Jones, Carole. *Painted Shadow : A Life of Vivienne Eliot*. London: Constable, 2001. (264, 215); and Gordon, Lyndall. *Eliot's Early Years*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977. (66-69).

manipulated, cruelly tossed aside, sacrificed, or even 'assassinated' at the hands of Eliot's consuming ambition.

Ozick, Gordon, Howarth, and a host of others critics fault Eliot as a figure who ultimately actually produced quantitatively very little poetic output, and of his other work, drama, literary and cultural criticism, very little enduring or lasting relevance or contemporary currency. Thus, "the extraordinary literary and critical authority that Eliot once commanded" (Kimball 61-62) results not solely from admirable poetic talent, or literary innovation, but rather is inseparable from a shifty, demonized early-career will to power, fueled by the fiery force of Eliot's all-consuming ambition. And, Eliot, perceived in the context of this popular critical narrative with his unsightly hypocritical maneuverings, might be most succinctly captured in the derisive terse snarl of Radiohead's Thom Yorke, "ambition makes you look pretty ugly" as heard on their landmark album *OK Computer* (Radiohead).

Eliot Emerging

Like Radiohead, often described as today's most dominant and influential rock band, T.S. Eliot too – we would do well to recall – was indeed "a rock star."[23] While the moniker *rock star* might initially strike many, (especially younger[24]) readers as incongruous when applied to Eliot, the description is appropriate. In fact the title sounds rather unexceptional, in comparison to other grandiose descriptions of Eliot at the height of his fame. This fame stemmed not just from his poetry, but from ambitious cultural maneuvering, his public persona, which developed in large part due to his criticism and his cultural studies texts and commentary.

As such I find fault in how Bloom dismisses out of hand Eliot's criticism and cultural writings, and find a more elucidating critic in Christopher Ricks who is very much concerned with the *entire corpus* of Eliot's writings, and quotes his criticism and lectures with greater frequency than his poetry. While Bloom dismisses out of hand Eliot's criticism and cultural writings, Ricks is very much concerned with the entire corpus of Eliot's work, and quotes his criticism and lectures with greater frequency than his poetry.

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[23] When asked in a recent a recent interview if he reads poetry, Thom Yorke replied, "Yeah, T.S. Eliot. I've been reading it since school, I really enjoy reading him at the moment, I go to sit and have pints in the pub and read T.S. Eliot. I live in Oxford, that's what you do! You've got to fit in, you know what I mean?" (Yorke). Despite Yorke's characteristic jab at the snooty Oxford crowd, Eliot has clearly influenced the work of Radiohead.

[24] According to Ozick, "the mammoth prophetic presence of T.S. Eliot himself—that immortal sovereign rock—the latest generations do not know at all" (119).

Ricks edited a recent volume of Eliot's early poems, *Inventions of the March Hare: Poems 1909-1917*, and he litters it with numerous Eliot quotations from diverse sources, including Eliot's personal correspondence, interviews, and Eliot's own literary criticism and late-career lectures. While Bloom confines his appreciation of Eliot's genius to the poetic output of a single decade in Eliot's career, Ricks draws upon Eliot's entire textual output; Ricks even depends upon Eliot's criticism to spell out *his own* personal critical view. Ricks' most succinctly articulates this view in the penultimate chapter of his collection *Essays in Appreciation* titled, "Literary Principles as Against Theory." Here Ricks grounds the essay by turning to an Eliot's dictum from 1923: quotation: "A literary review should maintain the application, in literature, of principles which have their consequences also in politics and in private conduct […]" (*Essays in Appreciation* 312). Ricks incorporates Eliot's critical writings in articulating his own methodological framework, and he is also very fond of quoting Eliot's critical writings in elucidating the poetry of assorted authors, including Eliot himself (using Eliot the critic to explain Eliot the poet), as he concludes his *Inventions* preface: "one might apply to Eliot what he said of William Blake: 'His early poems show what the poems of a boy of genius ought to show, immense power of assimilation.'" (xxvii)

While Ricks offers a fuller and more complete analysis of Eliot than Bloom does, his methodology too, shows its limitations. The limitations of Ricks' critical model are perhaps best shown when compared to another pre-eminent Eliot critic, Hugh Kenner. Kenner, in comparison to Ricks, is less steeped in questions of intertextuality, allusion,

influence, tradition, and other such New Critical concerns. Kenner, like Ricks, makes uses of Eliot's entire corpus of writing, but does so with a fundamentally different approach. Kenner immerses his work in the cultural, historic, and economic fields surrounding the production and reception of Eliot's writings and in so doing produces radically different insights into Eliot and his work. One illustrative example of this is his short essay, "'Tradition' Revisited" (1988), in which he expands the textual universe of Eliot's "Tradition and the Individual Talent" from its commonly understood place as a static and unequivocal article in support of a hegemonic tradition. Kenner argues for a reading of the essay as a text that is critical of the same hegemonic unassailable monuments of canonicity it is said to enshrine. Recall the more common "hegemonic" assessment of Eliot and his articulation of 'traditions' from Cynthia Ozick's 1989 *New Yorker* article, where she disparages Eliot as an "autocratic, inhibited, depressed, rather narrow-minded, and considerably bigoted fake Englishman." She continues, "High art is dead. The passion for inheritance is dead. Tradition is equated with obscurantism. The wall that divided serious high culture from the popular arts is breached." In such a context, "Eliot's elegiac fragments appear too arcane, too aristocratic, and too difficult for contemporary ambition" (121, 152-54). Kenner reads against such a view in his essay, exploring the economic and critical climate circumscribing the composition of Eliot's essay, noting that "'Tradition and the Individual Talent,' with its talk of 'monuments' in an 'ideal order'" is often viewed, to use Ozick's terms, in a "too arcane, too aristocratic" manner, but Kenner points out, "what seems little attended to is the

contrived irony of such diction" (171). Kenner finds a "contrived irony" in Eliot's adopted voice for the essay by placing Eliot's essay within the context of changing British copyright law and explains how the Everyman's Library series adapted to the changing laws shifting "the literary tradition" further and further into the past. He notes, "Everyman's, and such rival series as those issued by Oxford and Collins, have this value for our understanding of Eliot, that they pretty well came to define what was meant by 'Tradition': a closed system, terminated decades back" (173). Implicit in Kenner's revelatory analysis is the assumption that an accurate and nuanced reading of Eliot's essay depends on not simply the text of Eliot's essay, but also upon the economic and symbolic maneuverings surrounding the text. The maneuvers serve as an impetus for the essay's composition, a reading equally dependent upon Eliot's voice, a voice, contrary to how it is commonly understood, that speaks with a considerable degree of irony and ire against the constraints of the dominant economic field of production. Too often, contemporary critics misread or simply ignore the crucial realm of voice, the crucial text behind the printed text, a field of meaning that inserts itself into multiple transecting fields of meaning, capital, and agency.

In the face of such a prevailing disavowal of Eliot, Kenner provides a very apt warning: "it follows that *Selected Essays* can mislead. Reading it in another country, the wench long ago dead, we are apt to take as neutral (though always intelligent) formulations and phrases that were aimed at the custodians of a specifiable milieu" (175).

Indeed, though "the wench" Eliot is "long ago dead," his navigation of assorted fields of both symbolic and economic capital continues.

Though Bloom and his disciple Ozick insist upon the death of Eliot, some would argue that they doth protest too much. Besides Kenner and Craig, the emerging discipline of the so-called New-Modernist studies has in just the past few years made some strides in recuperating if not resurrecting Eliot's former position of importance. Though several new modernist critics have revamped Eliot studies, the work of Craig Raine, Michael Coyle, Aaron Jaffe, Jewel Spears Brooker, and, perhaps most adeptly, David Chinitz offers both imaginative insights and thorny complications into a revised understanding of Eliot, his work, and, his exceptional career.

I single Chinitz out from among the New Modernist flock principally for two reasons: First, his scholarship exhibits a thoroughness often lacking in the writings of his contemporaries, resulting in a nuanced critique, at once meticulous and sharp. Second, because his focus on Eliot in relation to popular cultural offers, to a degree, a constructive parallel with my own work. In a handful of early essays, Chinitz concerns himself with Eliot's often-overlooked engagement with popular culture, particularly popular music and entertainment. In his book, *T.S. Eliot and the Cultural Divide*, Chinitz continues along this vein, though he expands the purview of his inquiry, distilling his project in the first few pages, "As this book will show … Eliot's actual relations with popular culture were far more nuanced and show a far greater receptivity than either his supporters or his detractors, today or during his lifetime, have realized or cared to admit" (*Cultural Divide*

4). I share an affinity for this critical approach to Eliot, and admire how throughout his book, Chinitz unearths compelling new material, and rather masterfully incorporates previous scholarship with solid arguments to counter his would-be detractors. Likewise, I admire how Chinitz declares his personal investment in his subject, yet maintains an analytical perspective. Chinitz acknowledges:

> If I am to be honest I must acknowledge that in writing on Eliot as I have, and in trying to make him "better understood," I am no doubt attempting to account for, and possibly to justify my own responsiveness to Eliot's work. How can one read with enthusiasm, and without discredit to oneself, an author who is so widely (and not entirely unjustly) perceived as, in Ozick's typically hyperbolic terms, "an autocratic, inhibited, depressed, rather narrow-minded and considerably bigoted fake Englishman" (7-8)?

Chinitz answers his own questions with the suggestion that there is perhaps some "unconscious" draw that appealed to Eliot's original admirers, and he hopes that by bringing this hidden "element to light to make Eliot more interesting and accessible" to readers of his own generation, and "make enjoyment of Eliot something other than "a guilty pleasure" (*Cultural Divide* 11-12).

I too hope, in the pages that follow, to make Eliot "more interesting and accessible to readers of my own generation." In comparison to Chinitz, my goal may, however, be more ambitious, or, at least more encompassing. I diverge from Chinitz,

broadly speaking, in terms of scope and critical methodology. Though Chinitz at times mentions broader implications of his work, he primarily confines his examination of Eliot to a relationship to modernism. Chinitz reveals the scope of his project when he writes:

> If a fresh approach to Eliot's relations with popular culture will enable a less incredulous reading of Eliot, it will also help clear the way for a better knowledge of modernism, and thus of our own response to modernity which is still (whether or not we choose to acknowledge it) conditioned by modernist representations. We needn't revert to an older, narrower conception of modernism as the canonical work of a few individuals to recognize that a misconstrued Eliot remains a major obstacle to a well-understood modernism. (*Cultural Divide* 11-12)

In contrast to Chinitz my inquiry does not investigate Eliot exclusively in relation to the cultural/historical phenomena of modernism. Rather I place Eliot, in the end, alongside Bob Dylan and Don DeLillo, two figures who, though at times discussed in relation to modernism, more properly belong to the realm of postmodernism (at least in the historical sense of the word). My scholarship extends beyond the reach of modernism into contemporary times and the fuller milieu of "culture" itself[25].

[25] Of course, "modernism" and especially "postmodernism" are themselves contested terms with myriad connotations, and no clear lines of definition. As suggested by the title of Hassan's foundational essay, one can only move "*Towards* a Concept of Postmodernism" (emphasis added). Though Hassan's essay has been printed in countless collections I first encountered it here :Ihab Hassan, "Towards a Concept of Postmodernism," in Geyh, P. et al (eds.) (1998) Postmodern American Fiction: A Norton Anthology (586-593). Along the lines, the term "culture" is so vague, and used in so

Having marked my broader scope, in relation to Chinitz, I should note that my project does not attempt to put forth a comprehensive purview of "culture," nor does it seek a radical new definition of culture. Rather, (however creatively) I build upon the established work of other cultural studies scholars. So for my purposes here, Eliot himself provides an apt initial delineation of culture when he writes in "Notes Toward a definition of Culture," "my contention that culture is not merely the sum of several activities, but a *way of life*" (*Christianity and Culture* 14). Eliot points the way toward my departure with Chinitz in terms of methodology or critical framework. After recounting some of the complexities and critical contributions regarding Eliot and popular culture, Chinitz hones in on a single word, "ambivalence," which serves as a distillation of his critical methodology. Chinitz claims [Eliot] "schooled himself for years to write plays that could be mounted as 'big-budget productions' on Broadway," and asserts that "Eliot bore an ambivalent attachment rather than a simple hostility" to Tin Pan Alley songs and "other genres that tread the always-indistinct line between 'mass' and 'popular'" (*Cultural Divide* 11-12). Chinitz then notes, "Having invoked its name three times, I had better put in a word for the much-maligned condition of ambivalence" (*Cultural Divide* 9). Chinitz ascribes the modifier "much-maligned" to ambivalence for its associations with New Criticism, using Terry Eagleton as a straw man: "Terry Eagleton sums up the case against ambivalence when he describes the 'New

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many contexts so as to have spawned a number of books attempting to define and delineate "culture." Among these one could do worse than begin with Eliot's similarly titled, "Notes Toward a Definition of Culture."

Critical poem' as a 'delicate equipoise of contending attitudes' and thus 'a recipe for political inertia.'" (*Cultural Divide* 10). Chinitz then quotes further from Eagleton on this process of reading which "meant committing yourself to nothing: all that poetry taught you was 'disinterestedness,' a serene, speculative, impeccably even-handed rejection of anything in particular" (10). Clearly Chinitz wishes to dissociate negative New Critical connotations from "ambivalence" as it will be a key term for his analysis. One could easily gloss over the fact that Eagleton offers a decidedly political analysis focused quite particularly on reading "the 'New Critical Poem.'" Whatever one ascribes, Eagleton's analysis, at the very least, doesn't adequately, to use Chinitz's wording, "sum up the case against ambivalence." A more accurate distillation of Eagleton's assessment as presented here would be that he offers prescription against a particular notion of "ambivalence" with connotations of inaction, a lack of an overriding passion or strong feeling.

Chinitz, perhaps predictably means to rescue his keystone concept of "ambivalence" from these particular connotations, and in the process, he reveals two telling descriptions of his enhanced sense of ambiguity that highlight the ways in which our methodologies diverge. First, he mentions the word in relation to "the modern disposition," writing:

> Ambivalence (not irony, which is merely one of its symptoms) is the characteristic modern disposition, because ambivalence is the one mature response to most of the cultural phenomena of the modern world—rapid transit, Hollywood, television, youth culture, globalization, the Internet,

> identity politics, postmodernism, consumerism—which are themselves full of contradiction, never monolithic, and seldom coherent. To this list one could add T. S. Eliot himself another complex product of modernity, whose work is full of contradiction and mood—expansive, sympathetic, reactionary, wise, snobbish, visionary, parochial. To respond to Eliot without some measure of internal conflict is without doubt either to over- or to underread him. (10)

Chinitz begins by delineating ambivalence from irony, and one might question why Chinitz chooses "ambivalence" over the rhetorically-linked term "ambiguity" which, William Empson goes into great detail to delineate into at least seven types[26]. Pushing irony aside as Chinitz does, must one insist that ambivalence is both "*the* characteristic modern disposition" as well as "*the one* mature response" to the varied cultural phenomenon of the world? Surely Chinitz'singular insistence here on ambivalence as the only mature reaction to the modern world is too, "monolithic." Chinitz also glosses over a rhetorical fallacy, either in terms of causality or equivocation; he construes ambivalence here to be the distinguishing modern *disposition* as well as somehow simultaneously the *response* to the modern world—temperament and reaction. One might grant Chinitz this moment of confusion as when he deals with the specifics of Eliot's texts he seldom slips

[26] Empson begins by defining ambiguity as "any verbal nuance, however slight, which gives room for alternative reactions to the same piece of language" (1). The delineations into specific connotations of the term enable a precision greater than that achieved by Chinitz, and though the term sometimes lacks precision in specific application, Empson shows how one can find useful even the ambiguity in 'ambiguity'" (6).

from coherent analysis. However, Chinitz's compilation of the phenomena of the modern world proves too expansive, as his list collects everything from the antiquated-sounding "rapid transit" to the (capitalized) Internet, including both television and identity politics, and even reaching to include the whole of "youth culture" and postmodernism. Given the profusion of this laundry list, I find that his key critical term lacks much explanatory power or precision. I would also conjecture that few would find ambivalence as the only mature response to each and every of these disparate phenomena—ambivalence may, however, be the one proper response to this list (with Eagleton's connotations included). I am decidedly not ambivalent about Chinitz's appending Eliot to his sundry compilation: "To this list one could add T. S. Eliot himself another complex product of modernity, whose work is full of contradiction and mood" (10). Eliot as tacked on here lacks agency, becoming merely another "product of modernity" along with rapid transit and consumerism. And herein lies a key difference between Chinitz's methodology and my own examination of Eliot which forefronts Eliot's agency; my answer to Chinitz's ambivalence is, in a word, *ambition*.

Of course, Chinitz remains too complex a critic to deny all sense of agency to Eliot, yet I find even where he grants Eliot a remarkable sense of agency, or of being in some way exceptional, he hamstrings both his analysis and Eliot's achievement. He writes:

> Given the centrality of ambivalence in postindustrial structures of feeling, it is not surprising that a writer who memorably registers a deeply and

> widely felt ambivalence should win a following. And Eliot made poetry, indeed a career, out of an ambivalent sensitivity to the experiences of modern life. Despite his many idiosyncrasies—for as his biographers have shown, Eliot was almost anything but a representative man of his time—his determined exploration of states of ambivalence under modernity, and the strikingly contemporary poetics he devised for giving expression to those states, resonated with an extraordinarily diverse readership that crossed numerous lines of nationality, age, gender, and culture. (10)

Though ostensibly paying tribute to Eliot's personal achievement, he finds what can only be considered an exceptional achievement as "not surprising," with Eliot merely "winning a following." Chinitz attributes Eliot's success to a kind of cultural pre-condition "the centrality of ambivalence in postindustrial structures of feeling," the sort of post-structuralism jargon, which, I must confess, leaves me rather confused. Chinitz remains indistinct here because he's too reliant on his key term, but, regardless, I find Chintz's assertion that Eliot constructed not just his poetry, but "indeed a *career* out of an ambivalent sensitivity to the experiences of modern life" misplaced, if not completely wrong (10). Similarly, I find that Chinitz places too much, for lack of a better term, *importance,* on Eliot's audience. He suggests that once Eliot explored these mysterious "states" of ambivalence, and gave them expression, albeit through "the strikingly contemporary poetics he devised," that he in some way hit upon a kind of hidden or pervasive "register" that in some way resonated with nearly everyone, enchantingly

crossing "lines of nationality, age, gender, and culture" (10). Eliot himself, especially in his unpublished correspondence, often refers to his audience or more accurately his audiences, either explicitly, or implicitly, but quite often with a nuanced understanding of a particular audience in relation to a particular event, text, or set of circumstances. I will take issue with Chinitz's depiction of Eliot's audience in such broad strokes, but, more importantly, I disagree fundamentally with his description of Eliot's career, indeed his minuscule analysis of the variety and workings of this exceptional career. Near the end of his introduction Chintz writes:

> And yet, reexamining the ceremonious, eccentric, elusively ironic demeanor that Eliot adopted as his public persona during the years of his improbable, more-than-literary celebrity, I discover ample grounds for critical misapprehension. Arguably, Eliot's' persona represents his single greatest triumph in the realm of popular culture: the conversion of himself into a world-famous literary legend. That legend unfortunately was Cynthia Ozick's Eliot and ours: Eliot, the human embodiment of high culture. (17)

Indeed, I examine what Chinitz acknowledges as "arguably" Eliot's "single greatest triumph," what Chinitz describes in a tellingly passive construction as "the conversion of himself into a world-famous literary legend." Chinitz remains imprecise about the specific "years" of Eliot's "improbable, more-than-literary celebrity" as he is about his "adopted," "public persona." In contrast to Chinitz's ambivalent Eliot, I mean

to more clearly explicate an Eliot of ambition who became not simply "a" literary legend, but "the" literary legend. Eliot decidedly achieved a "more-than-literary celebrity," his "greatest triumph" is better framed in terms of a career than a conversion. This career is comprised not so much of any singular public "demeanor" or persona, but rather a plurality of personae, both public and private. And this career is itself the critical text for examination, though a dynamic as a matrix comprised of public performances, published, and unpublished work, and most significantly as an involved, ambitious navigation of the "field of cultural production." I hope through my detailed examination of key points in this career which Eliot both created and continually, actively, refashioned will show his celebrity and "triumph" to be not so "improbable" (mysterious, depersonalized) as deliberate (detailed, highly personal), though nevertheless remarkable.

One of the key new contributions to a better understanding of Eliot that my dissertation offers involves that very term, *persona*. Its Latinate etymology, literally, "a mask" calls forth a critical component of Eliot's career along with crucial aspects of his oeuvre and career hidden to other critics. Different writers and critics have referred to Eliot as a kind of chameleon, a master of disguise, masked and calculatedly inscrutable, pulling off one mask merely to reveal another, or adopting another camouflaging technique, what Murray Sherman describes as "Eliot's imitative behavior, like a chameleon whose protective coloring depends upon his surroundings" (277). Another important component missing from the work of Chinitz and other critics is Eliot's archive (particularly his correspondence), unpublished, and for most scholars inaccessible; the

few able to view the archive most often find themselves hamstrung, with publication and quotation largely forbidden under the niggardly, litigious purview of Valerie Eliot. Eliot's voluminous and varied correspondence, without a doubt complicates, if not essentially refutes Chintz's summation, of the "legend" that "unfortunately was Cynthia Ozick's Eliot and ours: 'Eliot, the human embodiment of high culture'" (17); Eliot's correspondence reveals a counter-narrative, bringing to the fore a distinctly *human* element to this legend. Commenting on his correspondence from a short period of time early in the century, Peter Ackroyd reveals a playful, even whimsical Eliot: "His letters to friends are often funny in a less self-conscious way, and he will ramble in a high-spirited or nonsensical manner about nothing in particular. Such humour even stretched to envelopes, and those addressed to friends such as Clive Bell often had on them verse instructions to the postman" (280).

In contrast to the stodgy persona so often attributed to him, Eliot writes letters that suggest not just playfulness, but also a remarkably diverse range of correspondents, and in writing to and about these friends Eliot lets slip a delightfully dark sense of humor, at times lewd, at times bitingly cruel, but quite often decidedly *funny.* Writing of Eliot during this same short time span, Ackroyd highlights Eliot's cunning and articulates perhaps my favorite of Eliot's "jokes":

> His friends and acquaintances in these years were people quite dissimilar form each other: Ezra Pound and J.C. Squire, Conrad Aiken and Mary Hutchinson, Wyndham Lewis and Clive Bell, Charles Whibley and

> Leonard Woolf. It suggests at the very least, a profound ability to "get on" with men and women, some of whose work and opinions he had no very high regard and about whom, in letters he was sometimes scathing … He had met the Sitwells, for example, at the Lady Colefax reading in December of the previous year (in a letter to Pound, he added an "h" to the first part of their surname). (89)

Such moments of humor are noteworthy in part because they belie the staid Eliot we are taught to expect in his writing – if not his poetry, then certainly his criticism, and if not his criticism then surely his correspondence. Yet, a cursory reading of the Eliot archive shows good reasons to expect no such Puritanism from Eliot. With the publication of *Inventions of the March Hare* (1996), many readers got their first *extensive* look at Eliot's bawdy "King Bolo" verses, which bibliographer Donald Gallup piqued critical interest in some decades before noting:

> On various occasions over many years, Ezra Pound expressed his admiration for a series of vigorously scatological poems that Eliot had begun while at Harvard, dealing with two redoubtable characters, King Bolo and his Queen. In 1922, when Eliot sold to John Quinn (for $140) a notebook containing manuscript copies of all his early poems, published and unpublished, he took the precaution of excising those leaves containing parts of the Bolo series. He seems to have given them along with scraps of other versions…to Pound. (qtd. in Ricks *Preface* xvii)

Reviewing the volume for the *New Yorker* critic Alan Lane mixes the humorous with the serious when he recounts:

> When *Inventions of the March Hare* came out in England last year, it made waves in some of the newspapers. Not because of a sudden surge in the public taste for vers libre but because of lines like this:
>
> > Bolo's big black bastard queen
> >
> > Was *so* obscene
> >
> > She Shocked the folk of Golders Green.
>
> Which shows what happens when vers becomes too libre for its own good. The rhyme. . . manages in a short space to insult both blacks and Jews. (88-89)

Clearly there is nothing redemptive about these lines; and Lane goes on to blast both Eliot as well as Ricks for his decisions to submerge these dirty verses in the Appendix or the volume commenting:

> "The editor is aware that such scabrous exuberances may lend themselves to either the wrong kind or the wrong amount of attention," Ricks writes. You bet they may. Poor Tom was a fogey, a bigot, a woman-hater, and an anti-Semite, but now it turns out that he laughed at blacks, too. How's that for a full house? (89)

If that's a full house, biographer Peter Ackroyd, suggest that it gets fuller, writing of the "epic 'King Bolo and His Great Black Queen'" that Eliot "seems to have derived a

certain satisfaction from the description of sexual excess, and for at least another fifteen years he would send extracts from this unfinished (and as yet unpublished) work to friends—sometimes posing as an editor" (52). So, while Lane's review may make it seem like the 1996 publication of *Inventions of the March Hare* was a tremendous revelation and exposed a side of Eliot that he went to great lengths to keep from the public, attention to archival materials and previously published shows that the public already knew of these verses. In fact, in 1950 when Eliot appeared on the cover of *Time* magazine, the feature article casually inserts them among a list of mundane biographical details of his undergraduate years:

> In his junior year Eliot decided that he was too puny, took boxing lessons, once proudly sported a luminous shiner. He also delighted his classmates by writing risqué doggerel about a mythical King Bolo and his Queen ("that airy fairy hairy-'un, / Who led the dance on Golder's Green / With Cardinal Bessarion"). In addition to chronicling the doings of King Bolo, he contributed romantic verse to the Harvard Advocate. After Harvard, Eliot went to study in Paris for a year ("on the old man's money"), and in a Left Bank flat wrote his first significant poem.

How significant was that poem? Perhaps in 1950 the answer was still unclear. But Lane that "first significant poem," *Inventions of the March Hare*, and Eliot in their proper context:

> If there are no undiscovered masterpieces in *Inventions of the March Hare*, so what? Eliot readers would not expect them, since it was part of his genius—a twinning of his arrogance and his modesty—to refrain from publishing his poems until and unless they were first-rate. It follows that anything left behind was not up to scratch, although Eliot's scratch level is exhaustingly high. Unlike Pound and Yeats, he didn't lirnber up with lightweight volumes of semi-archaic lyrics before going public with the heavy stuff; he kept his pastiches and his practice pieces to himself, and then, when the time was propitious, he calmly changed the plot of English literature. "Let us go then, you and I": the first line of the first poem in Eliot's first book" (86).

From this first book, Eliot went on to achieve many other firsts, including the exploding remediation of the poetic form with the *Waste Land*. I find Lane to be very perceptive in locating Eliot's genius in "the twinning of his arrogance and his modesty." One need not, examine the entire corpus of his writings, to find it; rather it can be seen in a single line. As mentioned near the beginning of my analysis, Eliot made a number of recordings for the BBC, his first in 1929. Oftentimes these recordings were republished in print form in *The Listener.* On November 22nd, 1940 Eliot recorded a "conversation" with Desmond Hawkins entitled "The Writer as Artist." Eliot would often slightly revise the typescripts of his on air broadcasts. At one point during the broadcast Hawkins remarks, "Neglect it and it reverts to—if I may coin a phrase—wasteland." On the pre-publication typescript

in Eliot has marked a thin red pencil line through a section of text: if I may coin a phrase. When the issue of *The Listener* was published the line read, “Neglect it and it reverts to wasteland” (Eliot, TS “The Writer as Artist)

Vocal Dylan

If Eliot got his start navigating the literary circles of London, Dylan first came on the scene as it were in "New York town." Ever since Bob Dylan's appearance on the New York folk scene in the early 1960's, critics have been sharply divided in their assessments of the performer. Published in December of 1965, Thomas Meehan's *New York Times Sunday Magazine* article "Public Writer No. 1?" brought the argument into the public domain, and explored, for the first time in print, the wide split in the critical reception of Dylan. Meehan wrote:

> Surprisingly, a number of leading American literary critics profess never even to have heard of Bob Dylan, while, among those who are acquainted with his work, the critical opinion is sharply divided between those who don't take him in the least seriously and those who agree with the students that Dylan may well be an important new figure in American letters. (SM 44)

The sharp divide in viewing Dylan critically that Meehan brought forward was not soon resolved, and critical evaluations of Dylan continued to exhibit such polarization even into the late nineties; a considerable amount of controversy surrounded a 1998 research conference at Stanford University devoted exclusively to analyzing the work of Dylan, the first such conference at an American University. This conference rekindled the same debate that Meehan chronicled more than three decades earlier, as critics of the old-guard denigrated the conference. "As much as I enjoy Bob Dylan, he doesn't warrant

serious academic study," said Ron Rebholz, a Professor Emeritus of English at Stanford, "I think he's part of a general trend toward more pop culture at this university" (qtd. in Van Slambrouck 4). Others went even further. "This trend toward Elvis and Dylan classes and conferences has to be seen as part of a context of disparagement of higher culture," said John Ellis, a founding member and later secretary and treasurer of the Association of Literary Scholars and Critics.(qtd. in Van Slambrouck 4).

Despite the academic skepticism surrounding the Stanford conference, the late nineties marked the beginning of an unparalleled period of critical commendation of Dylan.[27] Presently Dylan studies, as reflected in the first half of the first decade of the 21st century, are characterized not so much by the controversy as to whether Dylan does merit academic study, but rather as to what form, theory, and methodology the critic should employ in grappling with Dylan's unique artistry. As Dylan scholarship has expanded vastly in the last decade the current lyrics-as-poetry mode of analysis that has dominated Dylan scholarship since the 1960's is showing its weakness, in favor of a more multi-disciplinary and dynamic mode of criticism.

Though there has been considerable scholarship and critical plaudits paid to Dylan's trio of recent studio albums *Time Out of Mind* (1997), *Love and Theft* (2001), and *Modern Times* (2006), the soundtrack for his recent film, which he co-wrote *Masked and Anonymous* (2003) has received very little critical attention. What little writing

[27] Dylan's 1997 album *Time Out of Mind* won three Grammy Awards including Album of the Year. In addition to being honored as the first rock performer to receive a lifetime achievement award at the Kennedy Center in 1997, Dylan was officially nominated for the Nobel Prize in Literature that same year and has been re-nominated five times since.

exists on Dylan's latest and very unique album tends to be curt and dismissive. A typical example is Oliver Trager who in his lengthy work, *Keys to the Rain: The Definitive Bob Dylan Encyclopedia* (2004), writes of the soundtrack:

> I suffered through a year of *Masked and Anonymous* anticipatory hype and all I got was a confusing film and this messy soundtrack […] if it's coherence you want, don't bother looking here […] As a trying-too-hard-to-be-novel semitribute mélange, the *Masked and Anonymous* soundtrack, though at times *interesting,* feels forced. Like the film, it never gains momentum and cannibalizes its own best moments, making for a gnarly listen. (417-18)

While one can either agree or disagree with Trager's assessment of the album's cohesiveness, arrangement, and song selection, close analysis of the mixed-bag *Masked and Anonymous* soundtrack forces attention on the mostly neglected extra-lyrical aspects of Dylan's artistry. In closely examining the most recent and so-far critically neglected Dylan recording, I hope to highlight the limits of much present Dylan scholarship as well as to explore new critical territory in writing about what it is that matters most about Dylan's unique artistry, namely his *voice.*

As a so-called younger generation Dylan fan (I was born in 1980) and personally championing Dylan since junior high school, I've encountered numerous comments from various detractors, especially among my peers, but one of the more frequent, frustrating and hackneyed comments I've come across is something to the effect of "I like Dylan's

songs, but I can't stand his singing," or "I like it when other people sing his songs better than when he sings them." These frequent dismissals of Dylan's vocal prowess both reinforce the popular media and critical portrayal of Dylan as a "poet," as well as neglect what remains perhaps *the* central aspect of Dylan's oeuvre, his voice. The popular dismissal of Dylan's voice extends surprisingly far. Indeed this misappropriation of Dylan is exhibited even by his peers and fellow musicians, who should have a more informed, immediate, and intuitive understanding of Dylan as a musician and singer. One example comes from Eric Clapton, who in a 1985 interview summed up Dylan as follows:

> He's a poet. Basically he's a poet. He does not trust his voice. He doesn't trust his guitar playing. He doesn't think he's good at anything, except writing—and even then he has self-doubts. Have you heard the thing he wrote about Woody Guthrie […] That to me is the sum of his life's work so far, whatever happens. *That is it*. That sums it up. (qtd. in Bauldie 152-53; italics added)[28]

Indeed that is *not* it, and those who would view Dylan as simply a poet and who would disparage his own delivery of his lyrics ultimately miss the point of enjoying Dylan; the genius of and attraction to Dylan lie largely in the realm of the *voice*. Greil

[28] For an answer to Clapton's ludicrous description, see Dylan's performance of "Don't Think Twice, It's Alright" with Clapton at his benefit concert, *Eric Clapton & Friends: In Concert - A Benefit for the Crossroads Centre at Antigua* (1999). Not only does Dylan sing with more authority and swagger than Clapton, he even steals the spotlight by stepping up and playing his own guitar solo over the top of Clapton's, as if to confuse the audience and ask the question who really deserves the title of guitar-superstar?

Marcus captures just how important, unique, and central the vocal aspects of Dylan's artistry well in his most recent book *Like a Rolling Stone: Bob Dylan at the Crossroads* (2005), opening the first chapter with something one of his friends said to him a couple of years before: "Everyone remembers where they were when they heard that Kennedy was shot. I wonder how many people remember where they were when they first heard Bob Dylan's voice. It's so *unexpected*" (*Like a Rolling Stone* 13).

Clearly something unique, noteworthy, and perhaps even monumental can be found in Dylan's voice, and though in talking about *voice* one encounters considerable difficulties due to the vast range of meanings and operations at work, I find that in exploring the subject one comes closer to what remains most essential and compelling about Dylan even today, more than 40 years after his appearance on the New York folk scene. A useful critical inroad to begin describing how voice operates both in the soundtrack of *Masked and Anonymous* and more generally throughout Dylan's entire catalogue is found in Roland Barthes' essay "The Grain of the Voice" (1977). Though perhaps odd bedfellows (a work of semiotics relating to classical music and a 2003 soundtrack to a rather bizarre film) these two texts dovetail nicely. In his essay Barthes writes, "it is this displacement that I want to outline, not with regard to the whole of music but simply to a part of vocal music … the very precise space (genre) of the *encounter between a language and a voice"* (*The Grain of the Voice* 294). I find that much can be revealed about Dylan's meaning(s) and appeal though an examination of this Barthesian "space," the junction of language and voice.

The *Masked and Anonymous* soundtrack is unique in the canon of Dylan's Columbia recordings for a number of reasons. First, it contains only four new Bob Dylan recordings; two of those re-workings of the Dylan tunes, "Down in the Flood" and "Cold Irons Bound." The other two Dylan recordings are arrangements of the traditional songs, "Diamond Joe" and "Dixie." Second, the new Dylan tracks are not meticulously produced and dubbed studio recordings but "live" tracks recorded on a soundstage with his band as part of the film. Third, and most noteworthy, the rest of the album consists of an unparalleled, eclectic mix of cover versions of a variety of Dylan songs. Indeed this album presents a somewhat shockingly diverse and international panorama. Included are Dylan songs sung in Spanish, Italian, and Japanese, not to mention recordings reworked in a host of genres including gospel, world-pop, and hip hop. The album thus presents a montage of sorts between the Dylan of 2003 and various appropriations of Dylan reflecting an extensive range of Dylan's career; analysis of this montage enables an understanding of certain indispensable and sundry elements of Dylan's vocal artistry.

The first track on the album, a cover of Dylan's "My Back Pages," opens with a half-familiar guitar riff soon followed by a more familiar second jangly guitar picking reminiscent of The Byrds' cover of the tune, and just at the point when one figures out that this is "My Back Pages" a sustained organ comes in erasing any doubt as to which Dylan tune this is, as we have heard this song played with a similar organ accompaniment with the all-star rendition of "My Back Pages" recorded on the 1993 *30th Anniversary Concert Celebration* double-album. But instead of a familiar singing of "crimson flames

tied through my ears / rollin' high and mighty traps" the listener hears something like, "Shudoki guddashki pullohdo I ni ito ohmeeto eeeiiooo." The analysis of unadorned lyrics (in this case Japanese) that has historically dominated Dylan studies, will not work for the typical, non-Japanese speaking American critic in this case. Oddly though, the song's lyrical alienation, the initial unfamiliarity, is replaced by a haunting familiarity. Though sung in a different language, the vocalist offers a very similar "grain"[29] of voice as the original *Another Side of Bob Dylan* recording of the song, and the listener is left with a very strong association between the two recordings. Even though a non-Japanese speaking listener does not comprehend the literal meaning of the lyrics, he or she nonetheless *understands* them; Simon Frith begins to explain how such an understanding comes about when he writes:

> Lyrics involve pleas, sneers, and commands as well as statements and messages and stories, which is why some singers, such as the Beatles and Bob Dylan in Europe in the sixties can have profound significance for listeners who do not understand a word they are singing. (120)

Dylan's "profound significance for listeners" who may not understand English that Frith points to resides not just in the specific temporal and geographic realm of Dylan's 1960's European performances but throughout the globe and continuing to the present. As *Masked and Anonymous* director Larry Charles pointed out in a recent

[29] As described by Barthes: "I shall straight-away give a name to this signifier at the level of which, I believe the temptation of ethos can be liquidated (and thus the adjective banished): the *grain,* the grain of the voice when the latter is in a dual posture, a dual production—of language and of music" (*The Grain of the Voice* 294).

interview, “Bob Dylan is a gigantic star in Japan”(qtd. in Block). Just as a Japanese audience unfamiliar with the “meaning” of Dylan’s lyrics derives significant identification and understanding from Dylan’s songs and recordings, the now foreign American listener gleans familiar meaning from this Japanese recording. Of Dylan’s songs Michael Gray notes that in his singing and voicing, Dylan suggests, “a level of emotion at work below the words, way out beyond the scope of the lyric” (110). This “level of emotion” transmits meaning and places the Magokoro Brothers as kindred Dylan-spirits, and this emotional element does not lie solely in the literal “meaning” of the lyrics, but in the phenomenological encounter with the song, what Barthes calls “the geno-song”:

> The geno-song is the volume of the singing and speaking voice, the space where significations germinate “from within language and in its very materiality”; it forms a signifying play having nothing to do with communication, representation (of feelings), expression; it is that apex (or that depth) of production where the melody really works at the language—not at what it says, but the voluptuousness of its sound-signifiers, of its letters—where melody explores how the language works and identifies with that work. (*Image, Music, Text* 295)

Applying Barthes, one recognizes that there exists a very present and felt realm of meaning apart from the unadorned lyrics of this song. In the middle of the Magokoro rendering one hears a near duplicate of the original Dylan “Back Pages” harmonica solo,

and a similar feeling is evoked as in Dylan's original recording—the individual tolling out against a corrupt and corrupting society; Greil Marcus in his landmark book *Invisible Republic*[30] captures something of this import when he writes of Dylan circa 1964, "the sound of his hammered acoustic guitar and pealing harmonica became a kind of free-floating trademark, like the peace symbol, signifying determination and honesty in a world of corruption and lies" (*Invisible Republic* x).[31] Even though the 'intellectual' or literal meaning behind Dylan's lyrics remains largely absent from this recording (in my mind, the Japanese words and familiar melody occasionally call forth an image or line or two from the original Dylan recording) the emotional meaning nonetheless remains constant and familiar.

The second track on the *Masked and Anonymous* soundtrack, a rendition of Dylan's "Gotta Serve Somebody" by gospel singer Shirley Caesar, opens with her preamble in which she intones, "if ever there was a tiiiiiiiime, when men oughtta follow God, that time is right now! … I'm gonna share Bob Dylan's song with you … here it is

[30] Greil Marcus, *Invisible Republic* 1st ed. (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1997) [I specify the edition here as Marcus has republished the work twice with different cover images, pagination, and slight textual changes—*The Old, Weird America: The World of Bob Dylan's Basement Tapes* (Picador, 2001) *The Old, Weird America* (Picador, 2011)]. Though I focus primarily on Dylan in terms of consummate remediation, Marcus is something of a master himself, continually revamping his cultural cache through public lectures, and cashing in on his past publications. His "updating"

[31] This quotation from Marcus applies very aptly when the Magakoro track is played against the visual backdrop of the beginning of director Larry Charles film which shows scenes of society degenerating into apocalyptic corruption and destruction. Tellingly, the Marcus quotation (altered and updated—no harmonica, electric guitar replacing acoustic, and the anarchy symbol rather than a piece sign) applies equally well to the Ramones' cover of "My Back Pages" (also featured in the film though absent from the soundtrack) as they rail against their own perceived "world of corruption and lies."

…" This track reveals another distinct dimension of Dylan's voice, quoting Barthes again, "the very precise space of the encounter between a language and a voice." What one finds in this "space" of both Caesar's singing and Dylan's original recording from his *Slow Train Coming* album is a sense of paramount immediacy. As with the original Dylan recording, Caesar's belting out, "you gonna have to serve somebody" cannot be taken as a suggestion, or as a mere philosophical proposition, but rather as an indisputable, cold fact. The verse lyrics suggest that no one is exempt from this fact no matter what his or her position:

> You may be an ambassador to England or France,
>
> You may like to gamble, you might like to dance,
>
> You may be the heavyweight champion of the world,
>
> You may be a socialite with a long string of pearls…
>
> You may be a construction worker working on a home,
>
> You may be living in a mansion or you might live in a dome
>
> You might own guns and you might even own tanks,
>
> You might be somebody's landlord, you might even own banks

The eclectic and far reaching listing of "You"s suggests that few can escape the reality that they will indeed have "to serve somebody," but above, through, and beyond the scope of this vast and largely inclusive list transmits that urging, preaching voice, full of impending doom and of Righteous Truth. I find a zany description of Dylan's gospel

album *Slow Train Coming* offered by Greil Marcus in 1979 also describes the effect of listening to Caeser's voice on "Gotta Serve Somebody." Marcus writes:

> Listening to the new Bob Dylan album is something like being accosted in an airport. "Hello," a voice seems to say as Dylan twists his voice around the gospel chords … "Can I talk with you for a moment? Are you new in town? You know, a few months ago I accepted Jesus into my life … and if you don't you'll rot in hell!" (237)

The manner in which both Dylan and Caesar "twist" their voices around the "gospel" chords accosts every bit as much if not more than the fundamentalist lyrics of the song. As with the Magokoro Brothers cover of "My Back Pages," Caesar's cover reveals an influential though somewhat different "grain" of voice, though still determined this time the voice seems more urgent and less cynical, a voice one associates with Dylan's Christian music period of the late seventies and early eighties.

Though the first two tracks of the *Masked and Anonymous* soundtrack present disparate and at times strange appropriations of Dylan's material, the listener confronts one of the most arresting and immediately unfamiliar contexts and appropriations of Dylan ever recorded with the group Articolo 31's performance of Dylan's best-known song, "Like a Rolling Stone." Through Articolo 31 we confront the song in Italian, "Come Una Pietra Scalciata," and in a genre rarely associated with Dylan, hip-hop. Mike Bloomfield's guitar-work and Bobby Gregg's drumming are replaced by break-beats, scratching, and heavy hip-hop drum-and-bass thumps. Al Kooper's swirling organ work

has been cut up and spliced in on the chorus along with bits of sound samples of Dylan's voice. At first it might seems that this recording offers nothing other than a curiosity to the understanding of Dylan's artistry, but the various hip-hop conventions employed here do in fact produce some telling results. Despite the considerable popularity and frequent radio rotation of "Like a Rolling Stone," I would predict that very few people can recite from memory all of Dylan's verses to this song from start to finish. When actually listening to the song many can pick out bits and pieces, "once upon a time / you dressed so fine … when you aint got nothin' / you got nothin' to lose," etc. … but, by in large, the verses, even though heard hundreds of times, still transmit as hypnotic, half-familiar preludes toward the all-too-familiar chorus, the rock and roll orgasm of that accusatory and celebratory chorus that begins with, "how does it feeeel!" One finds something similar at work in the Articolo 31 recording; the (now-rapped) verses lack the previous flashes of familiarity found in Dylan's *Highway 61 Revisited* recording, but the vocal cadence still hypnotizes the listener as before and anticipates the chorus even more so than with the Dylan recording;[32] we look forward to and long for the chorus now even more because in a sense these unfamiliar foreign lyrics cause a search for familiarity and when Dylan's voice enters, with that familiar, "how does it feeeel?!" we feel even more

[32] Dylan's torrent of word, image, and idiom does not easily translate into Italian, and in Articolo 31's translation or, perhaps more accurately, interpretation or rewriting of his lyric requires even more words than the English version; Dylan's lengthy English verses are dwarfed by the more profuse Italian rapped rendering, as Marcus writes, "There is the original fanfare…and then a harsh but leveled rap, relentlessly chasing what seem like thousands or words…in terms of its Italian word count at least four and a half times as long as Dylan's long song" (*Like a Rolling Stone* 82). See Appendix 1 on page 23.

like singing along. With Dylan's voice "sampled" here and only present in bits at the choruses, one really appreciates the level of emotion and feeling behind those four words, it's almost as if lightning strikes with the chorus and the rest of the song is a turbulent, rollicking dark night … the "how does it feel" lights everything up again before plunging back into the storm of the next verse. The force of the chorus lies not so much in the literal meaning of the question "how does it feel?" (it could be 'what did you say?' or any host of other questions) but in the vocal presentation, the searing anger, and raucous mockery behind it, a part of it. A description of lyric and meaning offered by Greil Marcus in his early book, *Rock Will Stand,* works well to highlight how meaning transmits through Dylan's voice in Articolo 31's cover:

> The metaphor isn't even principally the "meaning" of the words to a song; more often it is that the music, or a phrase or two words heard, jumping out as the rest are lost, seem to fit one's emotional perception of a situation, an even or idea. A pattern of notes or the way in which a few words happen to fit together hit a chord of memory and a perception takes place, a perception which structures and "rationalizes itself into a metaphor, not on the basis of a "logical" relationship, but because of the power of music and song to reach into the patterns of memory and response. (21)

Placing Dylan's disembodied chorus amidst the unfamiliar and hypnotic rapping by Articolo 31, the "jumping out" process is highlighted, more pronounced than in the

original recording. This reveals another aspect of the "grain" of Dylan's voice, the ability to create such powerful and familiar jumpings-out, in which one struggles not to sing along, and upon hearing, an immediate and visceral reaction always ensues: as with the chorus of *"*Stuck Inside of Mobile With the Memphis Blues again*"* when Dylan hoooowls, "ohohohohohh mmaaaaaaaaaaahhhhmmma, can this really be the end????" or every time he snarls, after a lengthy diatribe of a verse, "it's al-right maw" on *Bringing It All Back Home's* "It's Alright Ma, I'm Only Bleeding."

If the Magokoro Brothers' "My Back Pages" and Articolo 31's "Come Una Pietra Scalciata" arrest the reader due to their initial strangeness or distance from Dylan's work, other tracks on the *Masked and Anonymous* soundtrack seize the listener by virtue of their uncanny familiarity to Dylan and his songs. A cover of "If You See Her Say Hello" on the album sounds as if it could be Dylan himself singing the track, except that the singer's words are in Italian. Despite the difference in language, Francesco de Gregori's plaintive crooning on "Non Dirle Che Non E'Cosi" can easily be imagined as being sung by a *Blood on the Tracks* era Dylan. As with Shirley Caesar's urgent and powerful singing on "Gotta Serve Somebody" the listener is again accosted, but this time with a sense of profound sadness, gentleness. It is almost as if your distant Italian merchant marine uncle came to thanksgiving and drank all your parents' wine. He couldn't speak any English, but he picked up your acoustic guitar, sang out a song, and laid bare all of the longing and regret hidden in his soul nonetheless. This song highlights another important realm of the Barthesian grain of Dylan's voice, a voice that

expresses profound longing (this time devoid of any sense of mockery as with, for example, "Like a Rolling Stone")[33] and nostalgia, once again independent of the literal "meaning" of his lyrics. Other Dylan songs spanning the gamut of his career exhibit a similar "gentle" grain of voice, especially "Ballad in Plain D," "Buckets of Rain," and "Make You Feel My Love."

From the album tracks examined so far, it becomes clear that in one sense to talk about the "grain" of Dylan's voice is a mistake; one has to talk about the "*grains*" of his voice. To put it another way, when Barthes writes of "the very precise space (genre) of the encounter between a language and a voice," we have to think of space as a plurality or multiplicity and examine the *spaces* of encounter between Dylan's language and his voice both synchronically and historically. Far from not "trusting" his singing voice as Dylan has been accused of, I believe much of his genius and mastery lies in his control and ability to effectively and affectively adopt a variety of grains of voice. To illustrate this last point further, one can look to another track on the *Masked and Anonymous* soundtrack, Dylan's own recording of "Down in the Flood (Crash on the Levee)."[34] This marks the third "official" recording of the song.[35] The drums pound

[33]Additionally, one could cite a mocking grain of voice in numerous Dylan compositions that at times bleeds into the realm of the painfully and profoundly acerbic, including "Positively 4th Street," "Ballad of a Thin Man," "She's Your Lover Now," and "Idiot Wind."

[34] aka "Crash on the Levee (Down in the Flood)"

[35] Dylan first recorded the track in 1967 (released on the 1975 *Basement Tapes*). He later recorded it with Happy Traum for his *Greatest Hits, Volume II* (1971). Oliver Trager reports in *Keys to the Rain*, "as a performance vehicle 'Down in the Flood' remained on the shelf until 1995, when it was ominously rearranged … Dylan kept the song in heavy

more insistently and a new more pronounced guitar riff marks this latest recording, but Dylan's vocals also offer a new take on this song. The vocal exuberance of the *Greatest Hits Vol. II* "Crash on the Levee" has slipped out somewhere, and the sense of foreboding present on the *Basement Tapes* version is tremendously magnified. Dylan's vocal range is constricted; a darker, haunting sound emanates from his lungs. If the feel-good recording on the Greatest *Hits Vol. II* stresses the fact that the singer's lover ("moma") would have to search out another lover ("find a new best friend now"), the *Masked and Anonymous* recording warns of the imminent flood, the "crash on the levee" and the fact that "no boat's gonna row." Any thought of love and companionship is gone, replaced only by the struggle for survival. Dylan achieves this darker presentation mainly through his vocal presentation of the same lyrics as before. A description by Marcus from *Invisible Republic* works well to describe Dylan's vocals and how he maneuvers the space of meaning between the language and his voice in this recording:

> The voice … you might call Yankee Midwestern, though it is also Appalachian, mountain-still, a speech made as much of silences as of words, and the silence is the edge. *So What?* says the voice; it is dulled, unimpressed … unsurprised … the voice is flat: so flat that with the slightest inflection it can say anything, imply anything, while seeming to do no more than pass the time. (51-52)

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performance rotation in 1997, shelved it for a couple of years, and returned to it again in 2000 and '01 for a healthy smattering of displays" (162). Trager offers no specific commentary on the *Masked and Anonymous* performance and recording of the song.

Where before Dylan achieved a sense of exuberance and at times mocking disdain for his lover through a charged vocal track with howls and soaring and plunging notes, he now achieves a very different effect—a darkness and sense of warning employing only "the slightest inflection."

I apply Marcus' description from *Invisible Republic* in part because it works so well to describe the Barthesian grain of Dylan's *Masked and Anonymous* performance, but also because in *Like a Rolling Stone: Bob Dylan at the Crossroads,* Marcus offers no new descriptions of Dylan's voice in his four new *Masked and Anonymous* recordings.[36] Likewise, Christopher Ricks, one of the best known, most often-cited, and most frequently excerpted in the expanding genre of the "Bob Dylan Reader" contributor, offers no description of the most recent Dylan recordings in his latest publication, *Dylan's Visions of Sin* (2004).[37] Somewhat surprisingly, Ricks neglects to mention the soundtrack *or* the film *Masked and Anonymous* even once, omissions indicative perhaps of Ricks' strictly "literary" readings of Dylan's lyrics-as-poetry.[38] In the beginning pages

[36] Marcus does, however, present in *Like a Rolling Stone: Bob Dylan at the Crossroads* a brilliant description of Articolo 31's recording on the soundtrack; he also offers some of the most imaginative and vivacious descriptions of Dylan's voice to date as he chronicles the cultural and phenomenological experience of Dylan's most famous song from its inception to the present.

[37] Though I focus on Ricks' and his latest work, I could cite any number of Dylan critics, articles, and books that offer inadequate frameworks for viewing Dylan's work as a whole, and *Masked and Anonymous* in particular. I cite Ricks only because he is among the best known of current Dylan critics and because his *Dylan's Visions of Sin* has been so frequently featured in the popular media recently.

[38] I am surprised at Ricks' omission of Dylan's venture because if ever Dylan presented an audience with his, to quote from Ricks' title, "visions of sin," it is his musical, vocal, and dramatic performance rendered in *Masked and Anonymous*. Co-written by Larry

of the work, Ricks informs the reader that he will be analyzing Dylan's work in relation to the seven deadly sins, the four cardinal virtues, and the three heavenly graces; he writes, "the claim in this book isn't that most of Dylan's songs, or even most of the best ones, are bent on sin. Simply that (for the present venture in criticism) handling sin may be the right way to take hold of the bundle" (6). Though Rick's sin-centered critical model works well to set up the comparisons he makes between Dylan's lyrics and numerous works from the giants of the English literary tradition (Blake, Donne, Milton, Marvell, Keats, Herbert, Shakespeare, Tennyson and others), one must also recognize the considerable limitations of Ricks' model. While Ricks' work mentions much of the pantheon of English literature, conspicuously lacking from his analysis are figures who undoubtedly have more influence and resonance with Dylan's work, even when considering exclusively his lyrical output. Though *Dylan's Visions of Sin* weighs in at over 500 pages, Ricks makes no mention of seminal figures influencing Dylan including, Hank Williams, Jimmie Rodgers, Ralph Stanley, Son House, Harry Smith, and Bill Monroe, to name a few.[39] By neglecting the most direct and cogent influences on Dylan's writing and styling to concentrate exclusively on "literary" comparisons, Ricks in effect removes Dylan from the social community of popular music in trying to

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Charles and Bob Dylan, the entire film is concerned with issues of personal and social morality, decay, sin, redemption, grace, etc…the same expressed framework that Ricks employs in *Dylan's Visions of Sin.*

[39] Along the same lines, Ricks gives only a scant single mention to Johnny Cash, Dock Boggs, Cisco Hudson, and Leadbelly.

ensconce him firmly in the realm of the Anglo poetic canon, a position he perhaps deserves, but certainly not the central and best-suited position for Dylan.

Whatever the merits of Ricks' latest work of criticism, it is decidedly not "the right way to take hold of the bundle" that is Dylan's voluminous and varied output, and it certainly offers a very poor framework for dealing with Dylan's most recent work, *Masked and Anonymous*. Because Ricks works primarily in terms of lyrics-as-poetry, his analytical framework can say little about Dylan's poignant renderings of "Diamond Joe" and "Dixie" [40] though much can be said of the force that Dylan brings through these songs through his vocal and filmic performance in *Masked and Anonymous*, especially "Dixie." In an NPR interview conducted shortly after *Masked and Anonymous* was released director Larry Charles recounts how "Dixie" became part of the soundtrack:

> [T]his actually was done as he was warming up for the song we were going to record in the film, and he started singing "Dixie." And I realized that "Dixie" was the perfect song for the movie in so many ways on so many levels that I said let's turn on the cameras and film this. It seemed to really delineate some of the themes in the movie, about civil war, about racism. So it sort of worked on all those different levels, and it seemed like a song that Bob had always done though he had never done it before. (qtd in. Block)

[40] Likewise Dylan's other two self-penned tracks on *Masked and Anonymous,* "Down in the Flood" and "Cold Irons Bound" receive only the tiniest of illumination in Ricks' latest book, a single mention and a single adjective for each, with no accompanying analysis (see in Ricks' *Dylan's Visions of Sin* pages 302 and 440).

Dylan's singing of "Dixie" comes across as perhaps the most arresting and poignant of moments in both the film and the soundtrack, though one struggles to pinpoint exactly how and why Dylan's performance is so affecting. Indeed it does somehow seem as Larry Charles notes, that Bob had always done "Dixie" as his voice comes across so deliberately confident and soars through each chorus, "aaWAAAYYY, aaWAAAY." Though Dylan certainly "owns" the song in his *Masked and Anonymous* performance of it, one cannot unequivocally state Dylan's attitude toward the song, or the attitude he means to convey. Considering the racial implications attached to the tune,[41] perhaps Dylan is trying for a degree of irony with "Dixie." After all he did write "Oxford Town," "Hurricane," "The Ballad of Emmitt Till," and "The Lonesome Death of Hattie Carroll" among others. And yet, Dylan's determined, nostalgic voice singing throughout the tune and his hazy thousand-yard stare staring from the screen seem to conspire against an ironic reading of the performance. Perhaps Dylan means to punctuate and populate the indeterminate and corrupt imagined civil war of the future America that provides the setting for his film. Or, considering the role that Dylan created for himself in *Masked and Anonymous*— described by Marcus as "Jack Fate, a semi-legendary, all-but-forgotten singer: people remember they're supposed to remember him, but they don't remember why" (*Like a Rolling Stone* 72)—perhaps the song has a very personal

[41] I have in mind both the general historical racial associations of the civil war as well as the specifically filmic associations as the tune was featured so pervasively in D.W. Griffith's landmark *The Birth of a Nation* (1915).

message, Dylan's longing for his vanishing past prominence and notoriety, and a lament over a perceived sense of public disregard.

Ricks in particular and much of contemporary Dylan studies in general would do well to look to other writers and theorists of popular music. Simon Frith states in his essay, "Towards an Aesthetic of Popular Music" (1987), that for a good number of literary scholars examining music, "the suggestion is that pop music becomes more valuable the more independent it is of the social forces that organize the pop process in the first place" (136). In trying to remove Dylan from the mainstream and into the realm of the literary elite, they turn a blind eye to the fact, as Frith points out, that "what we should be examining is not how true a piece of music is to something else, but how it sets up the idea of 'truth' in the first place—successful pop music is music which defines its own aesthetic standard" (137), and hence comparisons with Dylan's artistry to that of Keats, Donne, or any other canonical poet often remain grossly inadequate and significantly less illuminating than examining his artistry in and against *itself* and the direct social and cultural realms from which it springs; this defining of "its own aesthetic standard" is especially apt with regard to Dylan's latest major offering *Masked and Anonymous* and his ever-growing string of public performances as he continues on his so-called "never-ending tour."

Though Dylan has repeatedly stated his preference for seeing himself as a musician and performer, "a song and dance man" rather than a poet, some the most renowned Dylan critics as well as numerous portrayals in the popular media continue to

mold Dylan principally as a poet or lyricist, eclipsing the more important performance and dialogical aspects of his art. Although I welcome these accolades for Dylan's literary merit, they place a false importance on the lyrics and neglect the more fundamental and important aspect of Dylan's artistry, the delivery of these lyrics. As Gary Giddens writes, "Dylan's assault on musical conventions precedes his words and music; it begins with his delivery. His voice (or voices) … generate the first visceral responses of attraction or revulsion" (286). One finds additional difficulty in studying Dylan due to the musical counterparts to his lyrics, which cannot be expressed by simply printing them on the page. Dylan's lyrics depend on his music and voicing for additional tone, meaning, and depth. Thus, one must take into account another dimension to his art, one that is absent from most assessments of literature yet nonetheless a sine qua non of Dylan's output, his voice.

Though the *Masked and Anonymous* soundtrack will doubtless remain a very minor album in terms of Dylan's entire recording career, this most recent Dylan offering does present a rich ground to be explored in the changing climate of 21st century Dylan studies. While it offers nothing new for traditionalist Dylan studies—no new lyrics to consume, analyze, and run-down the hidden allusions in—it offers much to examine concerning Dylan and his artistry, particularly his vocal stylings both in recent years and spanning the breadth of his career. In the end one should look towards the various ways in which Dylan creates new spaces and new encounters between his language and the modulations of his voice. Part of the pleasure of going to a Dylan concert currently and

seeing him perform at awards shows is often noting how *vastly different* he presents a certain song from its original studio recording. Far from a mere misplaced mumbler up on stage as portrayed time and again by the popular media, one should realize the vast multiplicity and range of spaces created by and continuing to be created by Dylan. He is not, as the media would posit, the anachronistic and clichéd "voice of a generation," but rather the dynamic, evolving, and multiple "voice(s) of generations."

Visions of Him: (Re)Constructing Dylan Visually

In a scene near the beginning of part 2 of Martin Scorsese's 2005 documentary, *No Direction Home: Bob Dylan*, a brash journalist approaches Dylan and brusquely demands, "can I see your left fingertips please?" An incredulous Dylan answers back "my left fingertips? Good God man! [suddenly standing back from the journalist and noticeably hiding his hands behind his back] *Left fingertips*? I wouldn't even show you my *right hand*." Scorsese presents this bit of film as an example of one of the many ludicrous questions posed by journalists to Dylan at the height of his mid-60's fame. I would suggest however, that this invasive journalist's request need not be viewed as completely inane and trivial, that there is something important and considerable to be gained by examining Dylan visually in close detail. That is to say, though it may seem obvious to do so, that one can indeed learn something about the enigmatic and mercurial Dylan by close attention to and analysis of what I will preliminarily term, *the visual Dylan*. One can learn much about Dylan through analyzing not just his left fingertips, but the whole range of his physique and the various manners in which it has been presented through photography, film, and written accounts both by Dylan and by others.

Part of the reason that so much is to be learned by a close analysis of the visual Dylan resides in the fact that so little has been done by way of visual analysis. The quickly expanding discipline of visual studies has much to offer in terms of an overall understanding of the pop-culture force of nature (culture?) that is Dylan and yet almost no substantial work has been produced as of yet. This is not to say that visual

descriptions and presentations have not been offered in abundance by various critics and commentators, but that such descriptions have all too often been incomplete, imprecise, or, most often and most bothersome, hackneyed, and (dare I say) incorrect. In 1997 David Gates begins his article "Dylan Revisited" with a visual portrayal:

> As you sit across from him, his face keeps changing. Sometimes it's that I-see-right-through-you look from the cover of *Highway 61 Revisited*—you barely notice the white hairs among the curls, the two days' worth of stubble and the thirty years' worth of lines. Now he turns his head: there's the profile from *Blood on the Tracks.* Now he thrusts his chin up, and he's the funny, defiant kid who used to wear that Bob Dylan cap. (62)

Gates' depiction exemplifies a number of the problems of what has been written about Dylan visually.[42] Accounts tend to be anecdotal, imprecise, and often, as in the case of Gates, wildly anachronistic. Sitting across from Dylan at any time in the past ten years, no matter how he angles his head, shifts his eyes, or puts himself in profile, it would be—to quote Wallace Stevens—a feat "of the most august imagination" to see visions of the youthful early and mid-sixties Dylan in the grizzled, wrinkled face that Dylan now presents to the public. Implicit in Gates' description is another of the hackneyed elements of visual descriptions of Dylan, Dylan as a mercurial shapeshifter who has undergone and continues to undergo a series of physical permutations, although Gates'

[42] Gates might have done well to give his written description even a cursory comparison to the visual evidence that accompanied his piece and confronted *Newsweek Readers*—two photos by Richard Avedon including a cover photograph depicts a decidedly geezerly and statuesque Dylan.

takes this cliché to a dubious extreme, suggesting that Dylan takes on various physical incarnations *from second to second*.

It is true that Dylan has undergone a number of (at times) drastic physical transformations throughout his career and has donned a number of different hats or as more commonly stated, has worn a number of different masks, presented himself in different and myriad ways to a variously admiring, hostile, confused, or simply indifferent audience. And critics have often chronicled Dylan's various permutations, linking certain "Dylans" with stages of his career, the most famous being the deep seated, oft-recounted, and almost mythic transformation of Dylan from folk to rock, from acoustic to electric. The written commentaries that chronicle a sudden transformation from a folksy, work-shirt-clad Dylan into a leatherjacket-wearing, sunglass-sporting hipster Dylan are too numerous to recount. As such the myth of Dylan's transformation from folk troubadour to rock vanguard has become something along the lines of "common knowledge." In addition to the written accounts of this make-over, many books and a copious number of articles "tell" this story visually.[43] As Christopher Pinney writes, "the effect of language, what Barthes called the 'certainty of the word', can also be achieved through insertion within a language composed purely of images,

[43] For some early examples see: Daniel Kramer's *Bob Dylan*. Pocket Book Edition. New York: Simon & Schuster, 1967 and Sy and Barbara Ribakove's *Folk-rock: The Bob Dylan Story*. (New York: Dell, 1966). Moving through volumes published in the seventies up to the present time see: Hoggard, Stuart. *Bob Dylan: An Illustrated Discography*. Oxford: Transmedia Express, 1978; Rinzler, Alan, and Jon Goodchild. *Bob Dylan: The Illustrated Record*. New York: Harmony Books, 1978; Blake, Mark. *Dylan: Visions, Portraits & Back Pages*. 1st ed. New York: DK, 2005.

through its placement within a visual syntagmatic chain" (87). A 1966 Dell paperback titled "Folk-Rock: The Bob Dylan Story" serves as a good example of this phenomenon. The title is tellingly hyphenated suggesting that the story of mid-sixties Dylan is one of a transformation from a folk hero to rock star, and the cover of the book boasts, "With 16 pages of exciting photographs." Presumably, part of what makes these photographs "exciting" is how they "show" this transformation from folk to rock. A page with two pictures—a *The Times They Are a Changin'* cover photograph and another of a plaid-shirted Dylan playing in the studio—is followed by Daniel Kramer's photo of the "hip" Dylan seated at a piano with the caption, "New Look."

"Illustrated" books such as Michael Gross' *Bob Dylan: an Illustrated History*, Richard Williams' *Dylan: A Man Called Alias,* and Jonathan Cott's *Dylan* among many others attempt to chronicle Dylan's history visually by linking various photographs from Dylan's career in a kind of "syntagmatic chain" that with its various photographic links "shows" the history of Dylan's career. Invariably, however, these types of illustrated histories involve presentations of photographs rather than analysis of them. The only work among the increasingly expanding tomes of Dylan scholarship that approximates a deliberate and sustained analysis of Dylan visually is C.P. Lee's 2000 book, *Like a Bullet of Light: The Films of Bob Dylan.* Lee writes in his introduction that, "while Dylan's achievements in contemporary music are undeniably great, there is less consensus on the success of his forays into visual media. This book sets out to assess the true merits of this work" (8). This short and seemingly innocuous sentence reveals a number of

considerable faults and limitations that one finds in Lee's book—that his analysis is often general, patchwork, and lacking in critical and theoretical rigor (i.e. the terminology "true merits" has little currency in the contemporary post-structuralist critical environment). Lee sets out to, in two hundred pages, "assess" Dylan's various "forays into visual media." While Lee does not include photography among Dylan's forays into visual media, he does devote entire chapters to all of Dylan's "major films," which he lists as *Don't Look Back, Eat the Document, Pat Garrett and Billy the Kid, Renaldo and Clara,* and (amusingly) *Hearts of Fire*. In addition to these films, Lee includes scattered analysis of Dylan as actor, Dylan as director, as subject of documentaries, in television appearances, in concert appearances, in music videos and in a host of other "forays" into the visual. Lee writes, "I've focused on particular items and mentioned many more in passing, though I have consciously made no attempt to catalogue all known footage" (8).

The dearth of film and visual studies theoreticians in Lee's bibliography is telling. Lee collects and analyzes all of Dylan's disparate forays in a (more or less) chronological ordering. Like so much other mediocre Dylan scholarship, much of his so-called analysis consists of anecdotes and quotations culled from various people "who were there" alongside Dylan during his various film and video appearances. What is lacking in this approach is a homology: a crucial critical framework to bind, order, and synthesize these disparate elements and, perhaps most importantly, to somehow locate/structure the varied visual evidence historically, in the present. Critic Alex Ross recently wrote about Dylan's present cultural state that, "he has a curious, sub-rosa place in pop-culture,

seeming to be everywhere and nowhere at once" (295), and this—everywhere and nowhere at once—is where Lee's analysis along with the majority of Dylan scholarship leaves us when trying to locate Dylan in the 21st century.

Unlike Lee's problematic and limited text, Scorsese's documentary provides an unprecedented and, if not ideal, then copiously rich, vehicle through which to explore and tentatively locate the contemporary, cultural Dylan. Part of what makes Scorsese's film so rich is the *access* to material that he was able to sift through, select, and *present* in his finished product. Historically Dylan has been careful, guarded and some would say miserly with what he permits the public access to, especially when it comes to audio-visual sources. Anecdotally, when one asks to see his left fingertips, he draws back and refuses even to permit a glimpse of his right hand. But in an unprecedented move, Dylan allowed Scorsese free access to his personal archives. Coupled with Dylan's cooperation, several others offered their permissions to Scorsese and, months before the documentary was released, the media built excitement for the project by reporting that Scorsese would present never-before-seen footage.

The most anticipated reel of film that Scorsese was reported to employ in the film was never-before-seen footage from Bob Dylan's performance on May 17th, 1966 at Manchester's Free Trade Hall. Bob Dylan's performance on May 17th, 1966 at Manchester's Free Trade Hall has come to be known as not only the seminal performance of Dylan's career, but as a watershed moment in popular music history. Greil Marcus, the most widely read and popular of Dylan's numerous cultural critics, describes the

concert as "likely the greatest rock 'n' roll show ever played" (*Like a Rolling Stone* 182). Dylan fans have circulated the popular bootleg recording of the concert since the early 1970's making it "the biggest selling bootleg of all time" (Kershaw, BBC Radio, 2005). If the Free Trade Hall concert stands as an apex in popular music history, an infamous verbal exchange, the so-called "Judas Incident" near the end of Dylan's electric set marks the highpoint of this concert. The basic events of the exchange—described by one critic as, "the most electrifying single moment in post-war culture (R. Williams)"—are commonly recounted as follows: In the auditory lull after Dylan and his band (then called The Hawks[44]) finish playing "Ballad of a Thin Man" and before beginning the final song of the concert, "Like a Rolling Stone," an angry heckler, seated in one of the hall's two balconies, shouts "Judas!" at Dylan. An angry Dylan is taken aback, but after composing himself yells back, "I don't believe you ... you're a liar!" before the band launches into the opening chords of "Like a Rolling Stone." Greil Marcus in his 1997 book *Invisible Republic* offers a particularly dramatic account of the "incident":

> As if he had been waiting ... a person rises and shouts what he has been silently rehearsing to himself all night. As over and over he has imagined himself doing, he stands up, and stops time. He stops the show: "JUDAS!" Dylan stiffens against the flinch of his own body. "I don't believe you," he says, and the contempt in his voice is absolute. As one listens it turns the echo of the shouter's curse sour, you begin to hear the falseness in it, that

[44] The Hawks for this tour consisted of: Rick Danko on bass, Mickey Jones on drums, Garth Hudson on Organ, Robbie Robertson on guitar, and Richard Manuel on piano.

> loving rehearsal — and yet that same echo has already driven Dylan back — "*You're a liar!*" he screams hysterically. (*Invisible Republic* 35-36)

The so-called "Judas Incident" has become infamous, but for such a dramatic and seminal event in popular culture, it is surprising how uncertain, varied and disparate accounts of the incident are. The event has been referenced and recounted innumerable times in hundreds of publications. In recent years, two very detailed accounts of the concert and the "incident" have been produced. In 1998 C.P. Lee, a music critic and lecturer in Cultural Studies at the University of Salford, published *Like the Night: Bob Dylan and the Road to the Manchester Free Trade Hall*, and in 1999 Andy Kershaw produced a radio documentary for the BBC titled *Ghosts of Electricity.* Despite the existence of numerous "studies," the general public tends to understand the event in terms of the account offered by Marcus, in part because though the incident is famous, access to an actual recording of the incident has been largely limited. This changed in 1998 when Columbia commercially released the famous 1966 concert, and, for the first time, thousands had access to a pristine recording of the incident they had before merely read about. Listening to the recording calls into question the traditional account of the event offered by Marcus. By way of example, music critic Alex Ross writes:

> When Columbia finally released a CD of the show last year — it had circulated for thirty years on bootlegs — neophytes may have skipped to the end in order to hear the renowned "Judas!" dialogue. They were probably disappointed. What you hear first is an ordinary lull, during

> which Dylan tunes his guitar. When the shout of "Judas!" comes, the crowd variously laughs, groans, and applauds. The voice from the back yammers on unintelligibly, and others join in. When Dylan responds, he is not screaming hysterically, or, indeed, screaming at all. (276)

Though the remixed and polished audio CD offered an exponentially more direct access to that fabled May night of 1966, uncertainty about the Judas incident persists. In hearing Dylan's reply to the heckler, one has a sense of the tone of his voice, but it is difficult to pinpoint the precise nature of the encounter without visual evidence.

In 2005, Martin Scorsese's *No Direction Home* presented for the first time a visual version of what happened that night, as he integrated D.A. Pennebaker's never-before-seen footage of the concert into the end of his two-part film. When one analyzes this visual text of the Judas-incident, one finds if not *the* definitive version of what "really" happened that night, a much more complete and telling version than any of the written and aural accounts that have been (re)produced over the years. It is hard to overestimate how valuable and anticipated this footage is, and how much Scorsese's presentation of Pennebaker's few minutes of film brings to a contemporary understanding "what really happened." One gets some idea of the optic vacuum that the footage supersedes when listening to Andy Kershaw's aforementioned radio documentary of the concert that the BBC recently re-aired to coincide with their premier broadcast of *No Direction Home.* The "visual" element of Kershaw's radio broadcast depends upon the hazy and imprecise spoken memories of various members of the audience that night as

they try to reconstruct the evening's event thirty years after the fact. For example at one point, Kershaw queries one concert goer, Maggie Kirk, "give us a visual idea ... what did he look like?" To this Kirk can only respond with the visually meager, "he was really small and dark and ... thin ... and lots of curly dark hair" ("Ghosts of Electricity").

Scorsese's presentation of Pennebaker's footage tells a decidedly different and richer story than the narratives that have been in circulation in a large part due to where he "begins" the Judas episode. C.P. Lee places the episode as happening all on stage just after Dylan finishes the penultimate "Ballad of a Thin Man":

> Having delivered the message of 'Thin Man,' Dylan got up from his piano stool, bowed to the applauding members of the audience and strolled back to put on his guitar and harmonica. As he checked his harmonica tuning one of the most (in)famous shouts in Rock 'n' Roll history came shrieking out from somewhere near the middle of the stalls 'Judas!'" (151)

In contrast to Lee, Scorsese begins the Judas narrative with Dylan in a dressing room just offstage, and, in a scene very reminiscent of the opening of *Don't Look Back*, Dylan is anxiously rummaging around the dressing room. Though he has a cigarette in his mouth, he picks up, fumbles with and then discards a pack of cigarettes. He then picks up his Fender Telecaster from the dressing room floor, fastens the guitar strap, and adjusts his harp brace. All the while he is going through these fidgety motions, his demeanor suggests consuming fatigue, and he gives a sardonic monologue to the few present in the dressing room: "last on the bill, not least ladies and gentlemen. Here he is, back from the

grave. [half smiles] ... right straight from the grave" (Scorsese). After Dylan completes his monologue Scorsese frames him walking out of the dressing room onto a black stage. As the camera peers into the blackness of the stage, one hears the familiar cry of "Judas!" One does not see Dylan's reaction to the taunt, but instead is confronted with a blank black screen with Scorsese's caption, "Judas". Scorsese then quickly cuts to a shot of Dylan on stage, presumably from a camera stationed in one of the balconies and we see the rest of incident. Before continuing on with Scorsese's footage, I examine the only kind of record we've had previous to this film, a record based on memory, aural texts, and a kind of cultural myth. In 2005 Greil Marcus offered another account of the incident:

> There was laughter, then cheers and applause, from nowhere near the whole of the house. The Hawks try to start the song. "I don't believe you," Dylan says finally, the contempt in his voice enough to suck water out of the ground. Then he was inflamed: "You're a liar!" The musicians again try to push him toward the music, and he turns to them speaking flatly, like an officer taking his troops out of their trenches: "Play fucking loud." (*Like a Rolling Stone* 183)

The visual evidence counters Marcus' latest account. While a purely audio "reading" of Dylan's "I don't believe you" might suggest acerbic contempt (as it does for Marcus), Dylan's voice takes on a less confrontational tenor with the addition of the visual. The film shows Dylan casually strumming his guitar, he then walks up to the microphone and

delivers the line, not with "contempt," but with indifference. Dylan lazily tilts his head to the left and shrugs as he delivers the line as if to say he merely doesn't believe the fellow. The Dylan delivering this line is an extension of the Dylan we have seen just seconds before in the dressing room—exhausted, last on the bill, and just "back from the grave." Dylan steps back from the microphone, continuing to strum his guitar, he takes a casual perfunctory blow on his harmonica to check his tuning. Dylan begins to bounce on his knees a bit and turns towards Robertson, emphasizing his strum pattern and inviting Robertson to join him. He returns to the microphone (all the while strumming and beginning to bounce more) to deliver his line, "You're a liar." What is most striking about this portion of the incident is the fluidity of Dylan: he strums his guitar, delivers the line as he moves his head from nine o'clock to one o'clock, steps back and turns 270 degrees nodding, toward Danko, and then further encouraging Robertson to strum his guitar with a increasingly an emphatic ONE!-2-3-4 , ONE!-2-3-4 guitar strumming. With Dylan's (physically) liquid delivery of the line, the sense is one of building exultation (note the direct contrast with Marcus's "inflamed" Dylan). Dylan looks toward Robertson again and more vigorously strums the opening chords, as if he can't wait for the song to begin in earnest with the full band in tow. In Marcus' account, "the Hawks try to start the song," and "the musicians again try to push him toward the music." The film clearly shows that is Dylan who is leading the charge here, and it is he who gives the final command, "Play it fucking loud!" just before the band comes all in a burst, Marcus describes Dylan speaking the line "flatly, like an officer taking his troops out of their

trenches." But this description does not fit with the visual evidence. Dylan encourages the band to raucously kick it up a few notches and follows his "command" with a huge, teeth-revealing grin. Here, as Marcus suggests, Dylan *is* leading his troops, but a more appropriate metaphor would be that he is leading his troops not "out of their trenches," but rather into a triumphant, brassy victory parade. Obergruppenführer Dylan finally kicks off the festivities with a mammoth down strum that he transfers into a briefly-held outstretched arm pointed toward the unknown heckler in the balconies, a gesture of ironic and exultant mock deference, as if to sarcastically say, *here's your traitor*.

Dylan thus effectively countered the popular mythology that had built up around the incident, and a hallmark of his genius how by offering 'new' footage, and as it were including the oldest footage taken of him from his early days in New York, and 'candid' interviews with Scorsese, he refashioned his credibility, by virtue of the function of his expanded archive and the new visual and aural resonances.

Bob Dylan in *Modern Times*

Since the 1960s, numerous academic critics have examined Dylan and his music, but by and large these critics have approached Dylan's artistry by relying merely on a kind of "lyrics-as-poetry" exegeses, drawing on allusions and parallels to a host of other famous writers such as Shakespeare, Burns, Keats, W.B. Yeats, or, more than anyone else, T.S. Eliot.[45] Most prominently, Christopher Ricks, Stephen Scobie, and Michael Gray have all cited Eliot's influence on Dylan and made critical pairings of the two, noting parallels between these important figures in American literature and culture. But their notations and examinations invariably involve (in a Bloomian mode of criticism) instances of intertextuality or "formalist" criticism; that is, they explain how Eliot may have influenced Dylan as a writer, and how this influence shows up in Dylan's song lyrics via allusions or appropriations of Eliot and his poetics. Ever since Dylan recorded the oft-quoted lines about Ezra Pound and T.S. Eliot fighting in the tower in "Desolation Row," critics have mined Dylan's lyrics for other Eliot connections, with one critic finding "at least 150 arguable references to Eliot" (Montgomery 28).

A typical example of this Eliot-centered formalist criticism comes from Michael Gray when he writes,

[45]For a more complete accounting of the history of Dylan studies, see my article "Think Twice: Dylan's Poetry." *Bob Dylan Anthology 2: Twenty Years of ISIS.* Surrey: Chrome Dreams, 2005.

The clearest of Dylan's cross-references occurs in the penultimate verse of "Desolation Row" (a title, of course, not unlike "The Waste Land")—the verse that does more than simply mention Eliot specifically:

> Praise be to Nero's Neptune The Titanic sails at dawn
> And everybody's shouting
> "Which Side Are You On?"
> And Ezra Pound and T. S. Eliot
> Fighting in the captain's tower
> While calypso singers laugh at them
> And fishermen hold flowers
> Between the windows of the sea
> Where lovely mermaids flow
> And nobody has to think too much
> About Desolation Row

This parallels the ending of "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock":

> We have lingered in the chambers of the sea
> By sea-girls wreathed with seaweed red and brown

Till human voices wake us, and we drown

Same imagery, same contrast, same argument. *(73-74)*

While there are obvious and explicit inter-textual parallels between Eliot's *The Waste Land* and Dylan's "Desolation Row," Gray's equation – "same imagery, same contrast,

same argument" – is simply too, for lack of a better term, equivalent. Whatever textual parallels exist in these two quotations, only the most hyper-textual mode of criticism could produce a calculus of equality.

I quote Gray not simply as a problematic specific model of missteps of Dylan/Eliot intertextual criticism, but as indicative of a larger problem that persists in Dylan studies. The mode of "purely literary" textual analyses of his lyrics as poetry has been the dominant mode of criticism up to the present, but it cannot adequately contend with Dylan's prolific, manifold output. While my larger project is concerned with establishing connections between Dylan and Eliot, I do so (in contrast with the majority of Dylan critics) bearing in mind an apt directive from T.S. Eliot himself: "literary parallels are most important, but we must be on guard not to take them in a purely literary and literal way" (235).

In terms of volume, if not correspondingly in scope, the field of Dylanology has vastly expanded in the past ten years, resulting in a marked increase in the number of publications purporting to explain the enigmatic figure of Bob Dylan or explicate some aspect of his unique artistry. As Mark Jacobson writes, "Bob is a big subject, getting bigger all the time, as he continues to flummox presumptions of reclusiveness by barnstorming a hundred dates a year, churning up even more Dylanology in his wake" (135). Exploring this wake of page upon page, text upon text, some critics have pointed to a key critical dilemma for any would-be Dylan scholar, one that involves a unique problem for dealing with Dylan particularly at the initial level of either bibliographic or

textual studies. While one has to contend with the large amount of Dylan criticism produced in recent years, one also has to grapple with the ever shifting and increasingly voluminous output of "texts" produced by Dylan himself. Alex Ross succinctly captures this difficulty when he notes that Dylan "is a composer and a performer at once, and his performances cause his songs to mutate, so that no definitive or ideal version exists. Dylan's legacy will be the sum of thousands of performances over many decades" (270). The problems of so many texts and so much semantic instability is compounded when one takes into account the multiple errors, inconsistencies, and (most problematic) incompleteness of the "official" printed versions of his "writings," the most recent being *Lyrics: 1962-2001* and *The Definitive Bob Dylan Songbook.* This bibliographic conundrum has left the field in such a state of messiness that, as critic Stephen Scobie writes, "every time a critic quotes from a Dylan song, the quotation is in some way provisional, hedged around with qualifications" (111).

One could point out and examine the many instances of printed textual misrepresentations and inconsistencies, but I would suggest that the textual conundrum of Dylan studies *goes beyond* the difficulties of dealing with the instability of Dylan's performed and printed song-poems, and includes the difficulties of dealing with a matrix of subtextual[46] printed and multimedia components. I argue for the importance of

[46] By subtextual I mean strata of meaning underlying readily apparent, accessible textual surface; though this level of meaning may often be hidden, implicit, or submerged, it is often more important than the surface layer. I am indebted to W. John Harker who distills a useful definition of "subtextual" from Eagleton and others: In this way, as Eagleton (1983) argues, the subtext reveals the 'unconscious' (p. 178) of the text, the

establishing the purview of the bibliographic or "textual" Dylan in a way that opens up a field of study which has thus far depended upon formalistic analyses of Dylan's lyrics as poetry, an outdated mode of criticism that cannot sustain the discipline of Dylanology when confronted with the unique bibliographic and "textual" challenges that Dylan's corpus presents.

Perry Meisel, NYU English professor and author of *The Cowboy and the Dandy: Crossing over from Romanticism to Rock and Roll,* speaks to these challenges when, in a recent review essay, he writes:

> However stunning his verse may be, Dylan's own highly organized materials come from a quantitatively larger and denser database than that of literature alone. They include musical and literary tradition, as well as the iconography of the singer-star, a very different and expanded kind of achievement compared to that of the traditional poet, playwright, actor, or musician. (107)

Meisel means to address the "larger and denser database" of Dylan's artistry as richer than has been traditionally understood, but he still fails to express just how diverse and complex Dylan's output has been. Dylan operates broadly within the realms of the literary, producing work not only as a rock and roll singer and songwriter, but also as a

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manner in which the text 'is not quite identical with itself' (p. 179). It is as if the text reveals fault lines, fissures on its surface which, if traced to the centre, illuminate the subtext lying beneath its surface. Where these fault lines appear-at these points of disjunction, rupture, and stress-the inconsistencies, contradictions, evasions, and obfuscations of the text show themselves, however unwillingly, as clues to a meaning which the text forbids itself, at least on its surface" (3).

traditional poet, a screenwriter, an actor, a record producer, a disc jockey, and even as a best-selling author and critic. The various hats that Dylan has worn can all be seen as aspects of the textual Dylan and, I would argue, these "hats" are best understood in the context of careful and deliberate maneuverings through, to use Pierre Bourdieu's terminology, the field of cultural production.

I have explained this model in my initial chapter, though it will be useful to recall a distillation from *The Field of Cultural Production,* where Bourdieu writes, "to understand the practices of writers and artists, and not least their products, entails understanding that they are the result of the meeting of two histories: the history of the positions they occupy and the history of their dispositions" (*Field* 61). Bourdieu here provides an initial framework for mapping out the complex history of positions and dispositions that Dylan occupies. Bourdieu never mentions Dylan explicitly, and he largely ignores the specifically musical realm in his discussions of individual fields of cultural production. But that Bourdieu applies to Dylan can easily be shown. Taking a section of Bourdieu's analysis of Gustave Flaubert and exchanging Flaubert for Dylan, one gets the following:

> The originality of the enterprise only emerges if, instead of annexing him consciously or unconsciously to one or another prestigious position in today's literary field (like the *nouveau roman*) and to make him an inspired (if unfinished) precursor, this project is reinserted as completely as possible in the historically constituted space within which it was

> constructed. In other words, taking the point of view of a *Dylan* who had not become *Dylan*, we try to discover what he had to do and wanted to do in a world that was not yet transformed by what he in fact did, which is to say the world to which we refer him by treating him as a 'precursor'. In effect, the familiar world keeps us from understanding, among other things, the extraordinary effort that he had to make, the exceptional resistances that he had to surmount, beginning within himself, in order to produce and impose that which, because of him, we now take for granted. (*Field* 205-06)

Bourdieu notes that Flaubert's major innovation with regard to the literary field was heralding the *nouveau roman*, and we might, continuing our creative replacement, change it to the *nouveau chanson* for Dylan. We may now take it for granted, but the idea of an intellectual rock and roll song had not been invented before Dylan, and the conception and practice of critically studying rock and roll lyrics as poetry was not undertaken before Dylan became *Dylan.* Accordingly, Bourdieu offers a framework that helps explain and extract how Dylan accomplished the position he now occupies, a process that involved a careful maneuvering through and refashioning of the field of cultural production.

In order to demonstrate specifically how Bourdieu enables a richer and a more comprehensive mode of analysis with regard to Dylan, we should apply his theoretical framework to Dylan's artistic output at various stages of his life and career, although, as with Bourdieu's own analysis of 19th Century French literary production, the framework

soon becomes complex with extensive intersections and myriad fields of economic, artistic, and academic production. Despite this complexity, if we are to examine, situate, and understand Dylan in the contemporary environment, we must focus on the text of this cultural maneuvering—a text composed of many printed, visual, and auditory texts: lyrics, interviews, commentary, and collations of songs and self-presentations that change over time, often over very short periods.

Dylan's artistry has never been confined to the page, and a criticism that relies principally on the printed word and a traditionally bibliographic approach not only confines his artistry; it misrepresents it. To put it another way, going back to the Steven Scobie quotation mentioned earlier, the "qualifications" always bordering Dylan quotations do not constitute a "hedge"; rather, they are *themselve*s a rich, verdant field of textuality—one that even *supersedes* the merely citable, printed lyrics and quotations of the "official" registers. I suggest that bibliographic criticism of Dylan in the present day depends upon a radical and multifarious process of collation more expansive and inclusive than that of traditional paper-bound textual criticism. To more productively study Dylan I pair Bourdieu's model of the field of cultural production with Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin's concept of "remediation," which they define as "the formal logic by which new media technologies refashion prior media forms"(273). I reconfigure their work and place a primary focus on individual agency; I situate Dylan as A *remediator* par excellence. This allows for a synchronic visual, and cultural, and (sub)textual examination; it offers a fuller mode of critical analysis than those that have

marked the field in recent years. This approach proves particularly rewarding if not essential when applied to the most recent and widely consumed texts that Dylan has put forth, especially Dylan's films *No Direction Home* (2005) and *Masked and Anonymous* (2003) and his critically acclaimed trilogy of recent albums: *Time Out of Mind* (1997), *Love and Theft* (2001), and *Modern Times* (2006).

For purposes of length, I will focus here on Dylan's recent album *Modern Times*. The album and its attendant cultural production are remarkable in a number of ways: critics greeted the album with nearly universal praise, and in terms of sales, it was a runaway success for Dylan, giving him his first number one album since 1976's *Desire*. It also made Dylan "the oldest person ever to go straight in at Number One in the American album chart" (NME). As with the majority of Dylan albums, *Modern Times* shows the bard creating inventive, allusive, enigmatic, and at times delightfully surprising lyrics, yet to confine the album to a purely lyrical literary analysis would be to miss much of the importance, meaning, and significance of the "text" of the album.

For *Modern Times,* in contrast to any previous album promotion, Dylan chose a highly visible ad campaign in which he teamed up with Apple's iTunes and created a television commercial. In the thirty-second commercial, Dylan, sporting a black Stetson hat and dressed in a sequined black western shirt and matching pants, is seated on a stool in front of a completely white background. The camera follows his hands sliding up and down the neck of his acoustic guitar as he strums it, taps his foot, and sings, in an up-tempo blues bawl, a single verse of "Someday Baby":

You can take your clothes put 'em in a sack

You goin' down the road, baby

And you can't come back

Someday baby, you ain't gonna worry po' me anymore.

Interspersed among the music and shots of Dylan playing and singing the song are brief shots of an attractive, twenty-something black woman energetically dancing; she wears a short dress, high heels, and a modern flat cap, and, most prominently, she's holding an iPod. Chosen from among the song's other eight verses, this lyric subtly complements the visual aspects and short narrative of the commercial. First, it is important to note that the dancing woman and Dylan never appear within the same frame. Instead, the camera cuts back and forth from Dylan to the dancing woman, establishing a structural separation and narrative distance between the two.[47] Taking into account this structural separation coupled with Dylan's joyous smirk and vocal disdain as he sings his lyrics, one reads the commercial's narrative as Dylan dismissing the dancing girl with all her hipster finery, iPod and all, telling her to put all it all in a sack, leave, and not to come back. Though he sings, "someday baby, you ain't gonna worry po' me any more," the cool cowboy of the

[47] On a related note, one can find this structural separation of Dylan and the hyper-sexualized female in advertisements previous to that of the Apple iTunes one. It shows up in a previous television commercial filmed in conjunction with the Victoria's Secret "Angels in Venice" campaign. In this commercial, carefully selected portions of Dylan's "Lovesick" play in the background. Over this soundtrack the viewer sees alternating views of a lingerie-clad supermodel—Adriana Lima—and a mystifying, decidedly supercilious Dylan, though the two never appear in the same shot.

commercial seems to have reached that someday some days past, and in the temporality of the recurring commercial, he's quite evidently far from worried.

Viewing the commercial through the wider focus of Dylan's relationship to the music industry and commercial promotion, Dylan seems unworried about the charges that would come from his collaboration with iTunes—further charges of selling out to commercial interests and compromising his artistic integrity. It seems, however, that the imbedded narratives of his filmed commercials work against any direct charge of blatant commerciality. In the iTunes commercial, one can read Dylan's dismissal of the dancing young woman as a dismissal of the very sponsor he has teamed up with, as a rejection of the whole enterprise he's engaged in. Nearly all of Apple's previous iTunes commercials feature similar tropes—young, hip, urban dancers, often in silhouette, frenetically move to the background music with their attached iPods conspicuously in view—and it is no stretch to see Dylan's disdain for the ill-matched dancing youngster as a dismissal of the whole iTunes ethos. Such a reading comes about not only through the narrative of the commercial itself, but also in conjunction with other promotional material for *Modern Times.* Dylan was featured on the cover of *Rolling Stone* magazine in September of 2006, photographed in a nearly identical outfit to the one worn in the iTunes commercial. The magazine cover promises "an intimate conversation" between Dylan and novelist and critic Jonathan Lethem. In one section of the interview/conversation, Dylan laments the phenomenon of digitized music and in particular the loss of sound quality inherent in compressed, digitized recordings:

> [W]e all like records that are played on record players, but let's face it, those days are *gon-n-n-e*. You do the best you can, you fight that technology in all kinds of ways, but I don't know anybody who's made a record that sounds decent in the past twenty years, really. You listen to these modern records, they're atrocious, they have sound all over them. There's no definition of nothing, no vocal, no nothing, just like—*static*. Even these songs probably sounded ten times better in the studio when we recorded 'em. CDs are *small*. There's no stature to it. I remember when that Napster guy came up across, it was like, "Everybody's gettin' music for free." I was like, "Well, why not? It ain't *worth* nothing anyway."(qtd. in Lethem 76)

This quotation unequivocally illustrates Dylan's disdain for digitized, mp3 (or m4a) format music ("it ain't *worth* nothing anyway"), while at the same time expressing his realization that the days of vinyl recordings are not just gone, but, as Lethem captures Dylan's unmistakable Midwestern drawl, long "gon-n-n-e." If one takes Dylan's statements into account, that the man who is so critical of digital music is headlining the campaign of the largest seller of musical downloads might not be seen so much as ironic, but as deliberate and carefully calculated, even as part of his mission "to fight that technology in all kinds of ways." Dylan does so by encouraging listeners to use the available technology to hear how different this most unique album *sounds* next to other popularly downloaded iTunes favorites. Earlier in his interview with Lethem, Dylan

states, “this record should be compared to the artists who are working on the same ground. I’ll take it any way it comes, but compare it to that.” The interview reveals that the sound of *Modern Times* was the result of careful crafting on Dylan’s part:

Dylan himself is the record’s producer, credited under the nom-de-studio Jack Frost.

> “I didn’t feel like I wanted to be overproduced any more,” he tells me. “I felt like I’ve always produced my own records anyway, except I just had someone there in the way. I feel like nobody’s gonna know how I should sound except me anyway, nobody knows what they want out of players except *me*, nobody can tell a player what he’s doing wrong, nobody can find a player who *can* play but he’s *not* playing, like I can. I can do that in my sleep.” (Lethem 76)

Clearly, Dylan sees himself not just as the lyrical author of the songs, but also as the audible author (Jack Frost) of the highly personal soundscape of the album.

Perhaps not surprisingly, the popular media ignored the context of the interview and the sonic nuances Dylan meant to evoke. Reuters, along with a number of others news outlets, excerpted a single line from the interview: “I don’t know anybody who’s made a record that sounds decent in the past twenty years, really.” This quotation caused a feeding frenzy as countless outlets ran the quotation under titles like “Bob Dylan Says Modern Music is Worthless,” painting Dylan as a crotchety “65-year-old rocker,” trying to seat him firmly in the rocking chair that this age-specific description prescribes. The

description of the past-his-prime, has-been rocker is one that Dylan tackled head-on a few years earlier with his film *Masked and Anonymous* (2003). Dylan penned the screenplay under a pseudonym and cast himself in the role of Jack Fate, a has-been rocker who reluctantly agrees to participate in a largely corrupt benefit concert. Fate's/Dylan's motives for returning never become clear, but they seem to stem principally from a need to play before a live audience and for some tenuous fundamental connection, via music, that has been lost among the corruption, confusion, and shallowness of a modern society on the edge of apocalypse. Likewise, Dylan recast himself in a similar role with *Modern Times* and the attendant recording and promotional strategies that he employed, except here, rather than Jack Fate before our eyes battling the fate of his past mistakes and a corrupt(ing) society, we have Dylan's nom-de-studio Jack Frost so coolly and unexpectedly nipping at our earbuds through the rich and varied wash of *Modern Times* that hearkens nostalgically to better (sounding) times.

And what can one hear listening closely to Dylan's soundscape? One remarkable aspect of *Modern Times* involves the way that Dylan recasts himself, or at the very least, aligns himself with, for lack of a better phrase, "the common working man." On the rollicking "The Levee's Gonna Break," Dylan sings,

> Well, I worked on the levee, Mama, both night and day
> I worked on the levee, Mama, both night and day
> I got to the river and I threw my clothes away....
> Some people on the road carrying everything that they own

Some people on the road carrying everything that they own

Some people got barely enough skin to cover their bones.

On another of the album's tracks, "Nettie Moore," Dylan sings himself out of the role of one of our most famous cultural icons, the rock-and-roll frontman, and into the role of merely another journeyman musician toiling in the fields:

Gonna' travel the world is what I'm gonna' do

Then come back and see you.

All I ever do is struggle and strive.

If I don't do anybody any harm,

I might make it back home alive. . . .

I'm the oldest son of a crazy man,

I'm in a cowboy band.

These lines resonate because, despite Dylan's self-diminution, they carry a degree of "truth" or authenticity given the arduous schedule of Dylan and his band crisscrossing the globe on their so-called "Never-Ending Tour," barnstorming baseball stadiums, mid-sized theatres, beery state-fairs, and assorted awards shows, invariably garbed in old-timey country-and-western-get ups, and—depending on the mood of the night—slinking into delightfully twangy arrangements and unpredictable selections from his vast catalogue of songs, new and old. Dylan adds further to this hard-won ethos by dipping into a treasure trove of cover songs, at times obscure, at times inspired. One particular example stands out: in a 2002 concert in Denver, Dylan trotted out a bar-band staple, the

Rolling Stones's "Brown Sugar." To this day, I relish being there and experiencing how Dylan forcefully pounced on his guitar, wailed out the vocals, and took complete possession of the song, his band at his side tearing the hell out of the number as if the band were performing for tips. Knowing that the Rolling Stones, the so-called "greatest rock and roll band in the world," were themselves playing a gig in Florida that same night, I can recall thinking, "I know who the best rock and roll band in the world is *tonight* … and they're not playing in Florida!" Dylan and his band electrified me along with the rest of the audience that night precisely because we heard a half-crazed, hard-travelin' man "in a cowboy band," instead of rock 'n' roll royalty.

Scenes such as the one I just described repeat all across the country, indeed, across the globe, amidst Dylan's relentless touring schedule. They both enable and reinforce Dylan's kinship with the common working man that one hears on *Modern Times*. This sounds forth from the album most strongly on the appropriately titled "Working Man Blues #2." Dylan begins the song with:

> There's an evenin' haze settlin' over town
> Starlight by the edge of the creek
> The buyin' power of the proletariat's gone down
> Money's gettin' shallow and weak.

Released before the national, then global historic financial crisis unfolded, these lyrics align Dylan with the day-to-day economic malaise infecting so many around the globe, and in so doing, they provide another example of Dylan's eerie aura of prescience and

enduring relevance. The other verses highlight other troubles common to the traditional working man, and the recurrent chorus acts as a bolstering call to arms, urging listeners not to give in during hard times but to fight through them, to appreciate the smaller joys of life wherever possible along the way. He ends the song with this final verse:

> I got a brand new suit and a brand new wife
>
> I can live on rice and beans
>
> Some people never worked a day in their life
>
> Don't know what work even means.

There is a perceptible vocal snarl of contempt in those last two lines as Dylan degrades the fat cats and fortunate sons who have never had to "work a day in their life," a disdain that, when heard, rates right up there with Dylan's other famous instances of acerbic put-downs.

The inclusion of the appended "#2" in the title "Working Man's Blues #2" suggests not only Dylan's practice of radically re-arranging and sometimes tirelessly working through songs again and again in studio, but also, chronologically, locates the song as simply one more in the tradition of the poor, downtrodden working man's blues songs that Dylan has performed in recent years with his discernable turn to a blues-oriented catalogue. Thus, the song aligns him with the common working man, but, especially given the deliberate musical and lyric allusions contained in his most recently released albums, it also aligns him with the rich tradition of other hard-working bluesman, including, among others, Muddy Waters, B. B. King, Charlie Patton, Jimmie

Rodgers (the singing brakeman), Hank Williams, Son House, Memphis Minnie, and, most especially, Robert Johnson. Yet just when one begins to feel how deeply and craftily Dylan has ensconced himself in this tradition, he also transforms it; On *Modern Times*' first track, Dylan draws on the hip-hop tradition and gives an unexpected shout-out to none other than Alicia Keys!

Modern Times thus evokes Dylan's relevance in "modern times" while simultaneously showing a deep engagement with the working man's blues tradition. Critic Lee Marshall has recently noted that "Dylan's entire career is becoming understood in terms of its relationship to tradition", and I would agree with him even though, in the end, he constructs "tradition" too narrowly (270). The key text for critical examination is the multifarious and multi-modal work that Dylan performs in both inserting himself in the working man's blues tradition and, through this process, re-shaping it in unprecedented ways. And, of course, given the breadth and variety of Dylan's output in recent years, when writing about "the tradition," I mean to suggest not merely the particular tradition of working bluesman, but so many other traditions as well: certainly folk rock; radio and film; the literary tradition, including criticism, poetry, and prose; and, most importantly, the tradition of those rare, few, dominant cultural creators, arbiters, and *remediators*.

And less we forget, Dylan's work in becoming a part of "the tradition" and reshaping it is indeed *hard work.* Dylan's literary predecessor T. S. Eliot, in his famous essay "Tradition and the Individual Talent," reminds us,

> Tradition is a matter of much wider significance. It cannot be inherited, and if you want it you must obtain it by *great labour*. It involves, in the first place, the historical sense, which we may call nearly indispensable to anyone who would continue to be a poet beyond his twenty-fifth year; and the historical sense involves a perception, not only of the pastness of the past, but of its presence; the historical sense compels a man to write not merely with his own generation in his bones, but with a feeling that the whole of the literature of Europe from Homer and within it the whole of the literature of his own country has a simultaneous existence and composes a simultaneous order. This historical sense, which is a sense of the timeless as well as of the temporal and of the timeless and of the temporal together, is what makes a writer traditional. And it is at the same time what makes a writer most acutely conscious of his place in time, of his contemporaneity. No poet, no artist of any art, has his complete meaning alone. His significance, his appreciation is the appreciation of his relation to the dead poets and artists. You cannot value him alone; you must set him, for contrast and comparison, among the dead. I mean this as a principle of æsthetic, not merely historical, criticism. (49; emphasis added)

Examining Dylan relative to tradition, in a recent book, cultural critic Lee Marshall states, “He has, in a sense, stepped outside his own career and become something else, a

living monument to the strength of the tradition" (266). Marshall speaks to the achievement of Dylan in contemporary times, but I would add that *from the very beginning* of his rise to prominence, Dylan has been working, waging, refashioning, tunneling through, and, yes, oftentimes stepping outside of his own career, refashioning himself through the tradition even as he refashions the very tradition itself, and in order to best understand this masterful navigation through the field of cultural production, a would-be Dylan critic needs to undertake the colossal and extremely varied task of re- and de-constructing this tradition and Dylan's shifting place in it. Additionally, echoing Eliot, I take this as a principle of aesthetic, historical, musicological, and most importantly, cultural criticism in order not to just understand the present "working man" journeyman blues iteration of Dylan, but to encompass the complexities and paradoxes of his character and artistry, along with the daunting multitudinous richness of Dylan's particular composite tradition extending back to his early career.

Going from *Modern Times* and moving backward in time two decades, to 1986, Dylan released an oft-overlooked album called *Knocked out Loaded*, in which he sings, "It's been nice seeing you, you read me like a book / If you ever want to reach me, you know where to look" (974) In the current climate of Dylanology, although we can read Dylan, to use his words, "like a book," we should not as critics continue to confine his artistry (as well as any meaningful explication of it) to the material prisons of the printed and bound. In a 1974 *South Atlantic Quarterly* article, George Monteiro writes that "eventually the anthologies will get him." Monteiro's prediction of Dylan's inevitable

anthologization has yet to come to pass, though several critics have argued fiercely for Dylan's inclusion in "the Western canon." And while Dylan has been nominated several times for the Nobel Prize in literature in recent years, actual anthologies of American Literature and poetry have by and large not included Dylan's writing. The reasons for this exclusion result, in large part, to an unfortunate confinement to the critical study of primarily the page printed and the record scored, but critics and canon-formers would do well both to hear and more creatively heed the advice from Dylan himself: "If you ever want to reach me, you know where to look"

End Zone/Point Omega

Increasingly we can look to the printed page to find Dylan, and not just from someone "planting stories in the press." Just as *Modern Times* garnered unexpected amounts of success both in economic and critical reward, the publication of the first volume of his memoirs *Chronicles Volume One,* placed Dylan in the previously unattained position of praised literary auteur. As Dylan expresses in his interview with Lethem, this recent literary consecration is both most welcome and a novel medium and genre of production for Dylan:

> That's what I like about books, there's no *noise* in it. Whatever you put on the page, it's like making a painting. Nobody can change it. Writing a book is the same way, it's written in *stone*—it might as well be! It's never gonna change. One's not gonna be different in tone than another, you're not gonna have to turn this one up louder to read it." Dylan savored the reception of *Chronicles*. "Most people who write about music, they have no idea what it feels like to play it. But with the book I wrote, I thought, 'The people who are writing reviews of this book, man, they know what the hell they're talking about.' It spoils you. They know *how* to write a book, they know more about it than me. The reviews of this book, some of 'em almost made me cry—in a good way. I'd never felt that from a music critic, *ever*. (80)

Imbedded in Dylan's quotation is an insight that in publishing *Chronicles*, he is entering a different field of production (in terms not only of genre, but of critics, audiences, and longevity), a distinctly literary field of production that operates very differently than the related field of musical production, however literary the agents in that field may be. Dylan inserts himself into the literary field in the text of the memoirs, where he recounts visiting the home of Archibald MacLeish and "MacLeish tells me that he considers me a serious poet and that my work would be a touchstone for generations after me, that I was a postwar Iron Age poet but that I had seemingly inherited something metaphysical from a bygone era." In the memoirs Dylan also dispenses judgment on number of figures of American literature, at one point noting, "I liked T.S. Eliot. He was worth reading."(110-11) *Chronicles*, is, however, just one instance of a larger phenomenon that I will explore in my dissertation—that of Dylan increasingly moving into a specifically literary realm of cultural production. Along these lines, one might note a 2004 issue of the *New York Times* where Dylan appears, taking up a full cover spread not for the music section, but for the *Times Book Review* along with a decidedly bookish subheading, an adaptation of one of his song titles, "It's Alright Ma, I'm only Reading"(It's Alright Ma, I'm only reading). Dylan has not only been writing and reading about himself increasingly in recent years but also coming to us as a disk jockey and commentator through his weekly Theme Time Radio program on XM radio, where he takes time in every episode to recite some poetry or prose from a diverse group of canonical authors including everyone from Emily Dickinson and Ann Sexton to Dylan

Thomas and T.S. Eliot. Likewise Dylan is now appearing on dust-jacket blurbs, in the role of fellow author, praising the fiction of authors as in his prominent front-cover blurb for Tom Piazza's novel *Cold War* (2004) which reads, "Tom Piazza's writing pulses with nervous electric tension—reveals the emotions that we can't define." And just as Dylan increasingly inserts himself into specifically literary realms, others have co-opted his literary authority as in Ethan Coen's bestselling Dylan-tune-titled collection of short stories *Gates of Eden* or as in Marni Jackson's imaginative, however flawed recent short story "Bob Dylan Goes Tubing" (Coen).

Commenting on the literary field in Flaubert's time, Bourdieu explains his method:

> This method centers on three elements as necessary and as necessarily tied to each other as the three levels of social reality that they grasp: first, the field of power and the evolution of that position over time; second the structure of the literary field, that is the structure of the objective relations between the positions occupied by actors of groups competing for literary legitimacy at a given moment; and finally, genesis of the different producers' habitus (Field 194).

Bourdieu applies just as readily to Dylan as to Flaubert, begin to map out these three elements of Dylan's career as a way of building up the structure and understanding of his complex relationship with the field of literary production. The history of Dylan studies, and most especially the present state of the field, illustrate that such a multi-tiered

model is all but essential, if one is to account for the varied and unique artistic output of Dylan, especially this most recent phase of Dylan's career which shows him operating more and more within the specifically literary realm of cultural production.

As with Dylan, critics have paired DeLillo with Eliot. Frank Lentricchia in the epilogue of his critical study *Modernist Quartet* places DeLillo as the singular contemporary exemplar of the modernist enterprise—raging against human commoditization, loss of individuality, a fruitless search for authenticity—started by Pound and Eliot, writing, "the agreement, from Pound to DeLillo, is this: that the human equivalent of the commodity is now fully in being" (288). He goes on to link DeLillo and Eliot as writers of the apocalypse: "modernists tend to be apocalypticists . . . So Eliot, in the last section of *The Waste Land*: the hallucinatory images of exploding European capitals, and the sullen and hooded and swarming hordes. So DeLillo in *Mao II*: '. . . people gathering in clusters everywhere, coming out of mud houses and tin-roof shanties and sprawling camps and meeting in some dusty square to march together to a central point, calling out a name, collecting many others on the way, some are running, some in bloodstained shirts. . . .'" (290). Like Lentricchia, Paul Gleason links DeLillo with Eliot in the context of *The Waste Land* in DeLillo's *Underworld* (130-43). DeLillo, himself, alludes to Eliot specifically at various points in his fiction as well, beginning with his first

novel where *Americana*'s protagonist David Bell references "Prufrock" while musing on apocalyptic themes[48].

If the parallels drawn between Eliot and DeLillo are somewhat scant and mostly isolated to thematic explorations of the apocalyptic, the parallels between DeLillo and Dylan are, in comparison, more numerous and explicit, and I would argue, much richer and far reaching than has previously been explored by critics. The principal parallel that critics have drawn between Dylan and DeLillo involves DeLillo's second novel *Great Jones Street*[49]. The first critic to explore this parallel was Anthony DeCurtis, who noted of Bucky Wunderlick, the novel's protagonist, "Bob Dylan...is one of the figures on whom DeLillo's portrayal seems to be based." (132). Later in the article DeCurtis refers to Wunderlick as "Dylan/Jagger fusion" (132, 139). Others have described Wunderlick as "a sort of Jagger/Barrett/ Morrison/Cobain figure" (Wareham 384). Mark Osteen reads Wunderlick as a reflection of DeLillo the author, that this novel "amounts to self-criticism, a critique of DeLillo's own withdrawal from the public eye; to resist fame is only to allow it to escape one's own management, to allow facsimiles to replace the 'true' self" (Osteen 169). In contrast to those that read Dylan as merely "one of the figures on

[48] "There will be no fireworks when the century turns. There will be no agonies in the garden. Now that night beckons, the first lamp to be lit will belong to that man who leaps from a cliff and learns how to fly, who soars to the tropics of the sun and uncurls his hand from his breast to spoon out fire. The sound of the oceans seems lost in its own exploding passion. I am wearing white flannel trousers" (328).

[49] What seems little mentioned is how prevalent Dylan is in DeLillo's fiction aside from *Great Jones Street*. As with his third novel, DeLillo's first novel *Americana* is haunted by Dylan's presence, where DeLillo structures the novel's action around a trio of the freaked-out blues numbers from Dylan's mid-sixties albums.

whom" Wunderlick "seems to be based," I find evidence for reading Wunderlick as a character born of concerns fundamentally and unequivocally originating with Dylan. Such a reading need not discount Osteen's view of the novel as an exploration of DeLillo's own troubled relationship with fame and notoriety, but rather provides a substantial and important literary precursor, a framework through which to explore and enact this "self-criticism." Going beyond DeLillo's textual incorporation of Dylan into his novels one can locate, I would argue, a more important and revelatory connection between these two artists, one that exists between the two as, to use Bourdieu's terminology, producers in the contemporary field of cultural production. It is easy to draw several parallels between the careers of these two figures. Both achieved moderate initial critical success which gradually built before sharp turns in critical response and notoriety catapulted them into international fame with all of the attendant fanfare. From early on, Dylan found considerable favor among critics, but at the height of his career, Dylan was hailed as not only the most intelligent and literate rock and roller, but as a cultural prophet, "the voice of a generation," reigning in stratospheric heights far above any of his contemporaries. Early in his career, *Harpers* labeled DeLillo as "undoubtedly...the single greatest literary talent of the seventies," but even this hyperbolic accolade would be trumped time and again after DeLillo won the National Book Award for *White Noise* in 1985. Soon after winning this prestigious award, critics began to praise DeLillo as the paragon and savior of contemporary literature, as the living embodiment of postmodern American fiction. Just as early Dylan was celebrated among

a small inner sanctum for his uncompromising anti-establishment, anti-commercial stance, DeLillo's early career was marked by a similar uncompromising persona. In his book *Star Authors: Literary Celebrity in America* (2000), Joe Moran notes:

> before he became more broadly famous...DeLillo was clearly wary about the effects of even minor celebrity. The dustjackets of his early novels contained the briefest of bio-blurbs—a list of publications and his place of residence (New York)—and he did not give an interview until the late 1970s.(When this interviewer, Tom LeClair, tracked him down to Athens, DeLillo handed him a calling card on which was written: 'I don't want to talk about it' (Moran 116).

After the enormous critical success of *White Noise*, however, such a complete avoidance of the media and the literary community became untenable, and one can read DeLillo's career as centrally concerned with how to confront the issues brought on by celebrity, and once achieved, how to maneuver through the media without being consumed by it. As such, several critics have read DeLillo's novel *Mao II* as a kind of meta-commentary on DeLillo's own fame. The novel's main character, Bill Gray, a Salingeresque figure, "the celebrated author of two slim works of fiction who has neither published nor appeared in public for over 20 years" (120) decides to re-enter the public fray with a surprising decision to let a photographer take his photograph as a possible first-step to publishing his long-awaited third novel. Moran ends the DeLillo section of his books with these notes of the novel and DeLillo's character:

> Bill Gray is more than a satirical figure—he is a character through which DeLillo both romanticizes and critiques the role of author recluses in contemporary culture, by pointing to both the unavoidable involvement of such authors in the commodification of culture and the admirably unyielding nature of their rearguard action. The fact that DeLillo has himself rejected this approach suggests that he is aware that it may be laudable but is ultimately unsustainable (131).

Moran alludes to DeLillo's willingness to grant interviews, give readings, and be visible in the public sphere in recent years, and it seems that, like Dylan, he has consciously decided to take an active part in the shaping of his current public image and enduring legacy.

Moran notes, "DeLillo is clearly aware of the complexities and nuances of celebrity culture" (129), and I would argue that, from his earliest fiction through his recent multimedia promotional activities, DeLillo owes a considerable amount of his considerable awareness to Dylan. DeLillo has said of Dylan, "I think it's extraordinary that he has maintained the level of public interest that we've given him over forty-some-odd years. It's very difficult. It's nearly impossible for a rock musician to do something like that. Writers can do it only rarely." Writing in *The Guardian*, Gordon Burn describes attending a recent reading by DeLillo:

> When Don DeLillo read from the main stage at Hay-on-Wye in May there was a Sunday afternoon audience of around 2,000 and a genuine sense of

> anticipation. It felt like it felt in the 60s, going to see Bob Dylan. He began reading from his latest novel, Cosmopolis: "He took out his hand organizer and poked a note to himself about the anachronistic quality of the word skyscraper. No recent structure ought to bear this word. It belonged to the olden soul of awe, to the arrowed towers that were a narrative long before he was born." It is customary on these occasions for the author to read from the book he is plugging, and from the edition of it, hardback or paperback, that will be on sale in the signing tent after the reading. DeLillo, though, was reading from loose sheets of paper. (Burns)

Burns' description, which links DeLillo's appearance with Dylan's, also recalls Dylan's antics in recent years concerning his promotional opportunities, fumbling acceptance speeches, appearing bewildered, out of place, or coming up with something new and unexpected to do, say or wear, and in so doing, subverting the conventions of the promotional game in the very act of participating in it.

If DeLillo is participating in the promotional game more these days, he is doing so not only in terms of promoting his own publications, but those of others as well. He has with increasing frequency written dustjacket blurbs in support of fellow writers and recently appeared along with Greil Marcus at a public forum to discuss Martin Scorsese's Dylan documentary *No Direction Home* (2005) (Marcus and DeLillo 71-78). In this public interview, DeLillo remarks, "Dylan became one of those rare people who exemplifies his art in his person. Imagine the same music, the same lyrics, the same

instrumentations—but Dylan could not have been a fat kid with a crew cut and purplish Minnesota Vikings jersey. He...had to look as he looks..." (73). For DeLillo, the cinema and visual elements have been indispensable to his writing, even before his film-saturated *Americana* was published, all the way back to his very first published short story. In the quotation above and throughout his conversation with Marcus, DeLillo foregrounds just how important the visual elements are in Dylan's artistry. Taking into account the hyper-cinematic nature of much of his own fiction as well as his often-overlooked criticism, DeLillo provides a most unique and valuable literary parallel for examining this much neglected element of Dylan's oeuvre[50].

Beginning in 2001, Bob Dylan allowed Martin Scorsese access to his personal archives including never before seen photographs, video footage, correspondence, and personal writings, resulting in Scorsese's highly successful and revelatory PBS documentary in 2005. In perhaps the most controversial move of his career, DeLillo sold his papers to U.T.'s Harry Ransom Center in 2004 for a half a million dollars. The DeLillo archive, now inhabiting some 125 boxes and growing will doubtless provide valuable material for constructing new readings and unearthing overlooked meaning and affinities in DeLillo's work. The archive will supplant much current criticism by enabling a whole new avenue of pre-publication bibliographic critical texts. As a recent New Yorker article reveals, "he has kept engaging, detailed notebooks that shed light on

[50] The number of articles and book sections that analyze the filmic elements and cinematic allusions in DeLillo's fiction are too numerous to list. For an example of DeLillo's dazzling visual-centered criticism, see "Counterpoint: Three Movies, a Book, and an Old Photograph." Grand Street 73 (Spring 2004): 37-54.

the intellectual foundation of his novels. Most important, he writes on a manual typewriter, producing draft after draft of his work, allowing scholars a chance to see his creative mind at work" (Max 64).

Clearly Dylan has influenced the work of DeLillo. Like DeLillo, Dylan too types on a manual typewriter, and some of the zany antics he recounts in *Chronicles Volume One* seem like they could be taken out of *Great Jones Street*:

> Eventually I would even recored an entire album based on Chekhov short stories—critics thought it was autobiographical—that was fine. I played a part in a movie, wore cowboy duds and galloped down the road. Not much required there. . . .The novelist Herman Melville's work went largely unnoticed after Moby-Dick. Critics thought that he crosses the literary line and recommended burning Moby-Dick. By the time of his death he was largely forgotten. I had assumed that when critics dismissed my work, the same thing would happen to me, that the public would forget about me. How mad is that? (56)

Talent is everything; sanity is nothing. I'm convinced of it.

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